

Wildlife Express

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Black Bear

Photo CCBY Carol Von Canon on Flickr

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Black Bears

Black bears are the bears you are most likely to see in Idaho.

There may be as many as 20,000 black bears living in Idaho! If you go into the forest looking for truly black bears, you might be surprised. You are just as likely to find brown, black, reddish or blond-colored black bears. There are even white-colored black bears found along the coast of British Columbia, Canada. Blue-colored black bears are also found in British Columbia and in southeastern Alaska. As you can see, black bears are not always the color black.

Black bears are Idaho's forest bears. They have short, curved claws for climbing trees, and their darker-colored fur helps them to hide in the shadows of the forest. Even the shape of black bears help them in a forest. The head is pointed and slender; the rump is round and large. This gives black bears a wedge-shaped body that helps them squeeze through thick brush.

Black bears spend the winter in a nice cozy den. Black bears usually do not dig a den from scratch. They need a little dip to start their dens. A tree that has fallen over makes a nice cavity when the tree roots pull out of the ground. After a little enlarging, molding and lining with plants, bears have a perfect den and a nice place to give birth.



Cubs are born around the end of January or first part of February when their mothers are denned-up for the winter.

Newborn cubs are tiny, weighing only around 8 ounces. That's one-half of a pound. They are a bit bigger than a can of soda! Cubs are helpless when they are born. Their eyes are closed, and they have only a very thin layer of fur on their bodies. Cubs snuggle close to their mothers' bellies where they will be warm and find milk to drink.

When the cubs leave their winter dens in April or May, they weigh between four to 10 pounds.



Photos top to bottom:
Black Bears CCBY IDFG.
Bear Cubs USGS on Flickr.

Do you think Idaho bears eat a lot of fish and meat?

Many people think bears eat mostly fish and meat. But in Idaho, that is not true. Bears eat whatever they can find. In a year, about 95% to 98% of a black bear's diet is made up of plants. The most important food for bears is berries; chokecherries, huckleberries and buffaloberries are favorites. Bears have special tools to help them pick berries – their lips! Bears have prehensile lips. Bears' lips can bend and grasp. Bears can wrap their lips around berries and pull them off one by one. Straight out of hibernation bears are not the only things waking up, so are plants. In the spring when plants are harder to find, black bears search for dead animals, called carrion, to eat. Bears' keen sense of smell helps them find carrion. Bears eat many things; leaves, grasses, nuts, water lilies, insects and small animals are all on the menu.



Keep an eye out for black bears when exploring Idaho's forests, but don't be too disappointed if you don't see one.

Black bears are shy, secretive animals. If they know people are around, they usually hide, climb a tree or leave the area.



Chokecherry



Buffaloberry

Photos top to bottom:
Black bear with fish
CCBY Jitze Couperus on
Flickr. Berry illustrations
CCBY Mary K Johnson
for IDFG. Cinnamon Black
Bear CCBY Diana Robin-
son on Flickr. Black Bear
CCBY Citizen for Boysen-
berry Jam on Flickr.

A LONG WINTER'S REST

Have you ever been snowshoeing or cross-country skiing? It's a peaceful way to spend a winter afternoon. A certain kind of hush falls over the woods. You might hear birds or see a few animals, but some animals that were out during summer may be a bit more difficult to find.

Many animals are underground in burrows. Their body functions slow way down. They don't breathe as often. Their hearts don't beat as often, and there is almost no sign of life. These animals' bodies have sort of turned off for the winter. They may be hibernating.

Do you think bears hibernate? Years ago some scientists didn't consider bears "true hibernators." When a bear is sleeping during the winter, its body temperature only drops to about 88 degrees Fahrenheit. Marmots are considered true hibernators. Their temperature drops to 38 degrees Fahrenheit. They almost freeze to death! People used to think that since a bear's body temperature only drops a little, the bear couldn't be a true hibernator.

Today, most scientists call hibernating animals that drop their body temperatures close to freezing, like marmots, deep hibernators.

Deep hibernators have to wake up during the winter to go to the bathroom and eat. Bears can sleep through the entire winter without having to eat or go to the bathroom. That's amazing! It makes bears special. Some biologists are now starting to call bears super hibernators.

No matter what words you use, mammals that sleep in the winter have a few things in common.

They all need to go into their winter sleep with a thick layer of fat. They eat a lot of food during the summer and fall. Some of the food is stored as brown fat. This special fat is found across the animal's back and shoulders. During the winter, their bodies use the fat like food.

Most animals hibernate and rest during the winter because they can't find enough food.

Bears eat more plants than anything else. Cold weather and snow makes it pretty hard to find juicy fruits and plants. Actually, bears that live in warmer climates may not hibernate at all. The exception to this is pregnant females or females with cubs. Females that are pregnant den-up to give birth; females with cubs might den-up to protect the cubs. Bad weather may also make a bear den-up in warmer climates.

Can you think of other animals that hibernate during the winter?

Photos
top to bottom:
Snowshoeing
CCBY Sarah Hon
on Flickr. Black
Bear considering
hibernation CCBY
Mike Gifford on Flickr.

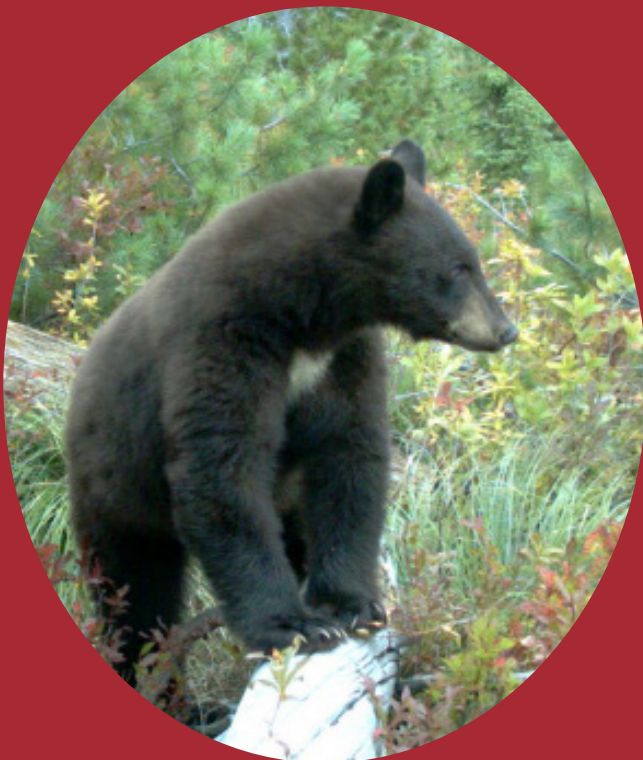
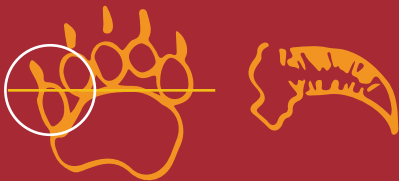


Black Bear or Grizzly Bear?

In Idaho we are lucky to have two different bears that live in our state - grizzly bears and black bears. Most of the bears people see are black bears. But if you are in northern or eastern Idaho, you might see a grizzly. Here are some ways to tell a grizzly bear from a black bear.

Black Bear

- Color may be black, brown, blond, cinnamon or rust.
- No hump between shoulders.
- Rump usually higher than shoulders.
- Face has straight profile. Muzzle looks long.
- Ears look long and larger on head.
- Front claws are less than 2 inches long, sharp and curved.
- Weigh between 100 to 300 pounds.
- 2 ½ to 3 feet high at the shoulder and 5 feet when standing on hind feet



Grizzly Bear

- Color varies from blond to black. Usually has dark-brown legs with light-tipped fur on head, face and across back.
- Large hump between shoulders.
- Shoulders higher than rump.
- Face is usually dished in between the eyes and the end of the nose.
- Ears are round and look small on the head.
- Front claws 2 to 4 inches long, light colored and slightly curved.
- Weigh between 200 to 600 pounds.
- 3 ½ to 4 feet high at the shoulder and 6 to 7 feet when standing on hind feet.



HELP! A BEAR!

Many people are fascinated by bears. There are toy bears, bears in cartoons, and even a bear that reminds us not to play with matches. Sometimes people forget that bears are curious, wild, and powerful animals. They are not tame and don't act like cartoon bears. Most bears are shy and don't want to be around people. The best way to avoid a bear is not to get their attention. Here are some things to remember in bear country.

When hiking:

- Never hike alone.
- Look for signs of bears. Tracks, droppings, claw marks, and turned over logs should tell you bears may be near.
- Let bears know you are there - sing, talk loudly or clap.
- Carry bear pepper spray on a belt holster.



When camping in wilderness areas:

- Choose a camp site away from berry patches and trails.
- Sleep in a brown or dull colored tent. Bright colors of red, blue and yellow attract bears.
- Don't cook, eat, or put anything smelly in your tent. Your tent should be at least a football field away from where you cook and eat.
- Hang food, the clothes you cook in, garbage, lotions, toothpaste and anything smelly, a football field away from your tent. Hang things 10 feet above the ground and four feet out from a tree.
- Have bear pepper spray within reach (never spray within a tent).

If you do see a bear:

- Keep calm and don't run. Walk slowly backwards.
- Don't turn your back to the bear. Look at the bear, but don't look a bear straight in the eyes.
- If a bear runs up to you, stand your ground - don't move. Bears often "bluff charge." That means they run up to you just to see what you will do.
- If a bear is within 20-25 feet, blast it with bear pepper spray for about two seconds to form a wall between you and the bear. Check to see how the wind carries the spray.
- If a bear continues to approach, give it another good blast with the bear pepper spray. Many canisters will empty in about seven seconds.
- As a last resort, lie flat on the ground. Cover your neck with your hands and arms. Leave backpacks on for added padding and protection.



BEAR HUNTING

In Idaho, we have a healthy population of black bears.

This allows us to hunt black bears in both the spring and fall. If you want to hunt black bears in Idaho, there are a few things to remember.

You must take a hunter education class to buy a hunting license in Idaho if you were born on or after January 1, 1975.

You can take hunter education when you turn nine years old. Go to Idaho Fish and Game's website at <https://idfg.idaho.gov/hunt/education> to learn more about the different types of courses offered and to sign up for classes. If you are not able to sign up for a hunter education class, you might want to get a hunting passport. The hunting passport lets a person eight years old or older hunt without taking hunter education. There are special rules and restrictions with the passport and hunters younger than 12. Be sure to read the regulations and call a Fish and Game office if you have questions. To bear hunt, you need a hunting license and a bear tag. You can purchase a hunting license at age nine but need to be 10 years old or older to hunt with a hunting license.

Look in the Idaho Big Game 2019 and 2020 Seasons and Rules booklet for the special rules for hunting black bears.

<https://idfg.idaho.gov/sites/default/files/seasons-rules-big-game-2019-2020-black-bear.pdf> One thing to remember is that females with young are protected and may not be hunted. If you are lucky and harvest a bear, Idaho Fish and Game requires that you bring the bear's skull and hide to a regional office, a conservation officer or an official check point. You must do this within 10 days of harvesting the bear. A person will remove a premolar tooth and put an official state export tag on the hide. Pulling a tooth is important. Bears have growth rings in their teeth just like trees. Biologists cut the tooth into thin, long slices. When the tooth is dyed, rings appear. The rings are counted to get the bear's age. With the hide, biologists will know if the bear was a male or female. This information gives biologists information about how bears are doing in Idaho. Hunters supply valuable information to help biologists make decisions on bear management and hunting seasons.

Bear hunting is an awesome lifetime sport! Give it a try. You might discover that you really enjoy it. Getting outside is refreshing and bear sausage is a special, tasty treat!



What's That?

You're walking along a trail. All of the sudden, you see something grayish-white peeking out of the tall grass. Leaning forward you realize what it is – a skull. Now the mystery really begins. What animal did that skull belong to, and how did it live its life?

This may be a hard question to answer, but the skull will give you some clues. One of the best clues you have are the teeth. Teeth tell you what an animal eats. Animals that eat meat need teeth that will help them cut and tear. Meat eaters, called carnivores, have meat-cutting teeth along their cheeks. These teeth are sharp and pointed. When the top teeth and the bottom teeth come together, the teeth pass each other like scissors. Carnivores have no trouble slicing through the meat they like to eat!

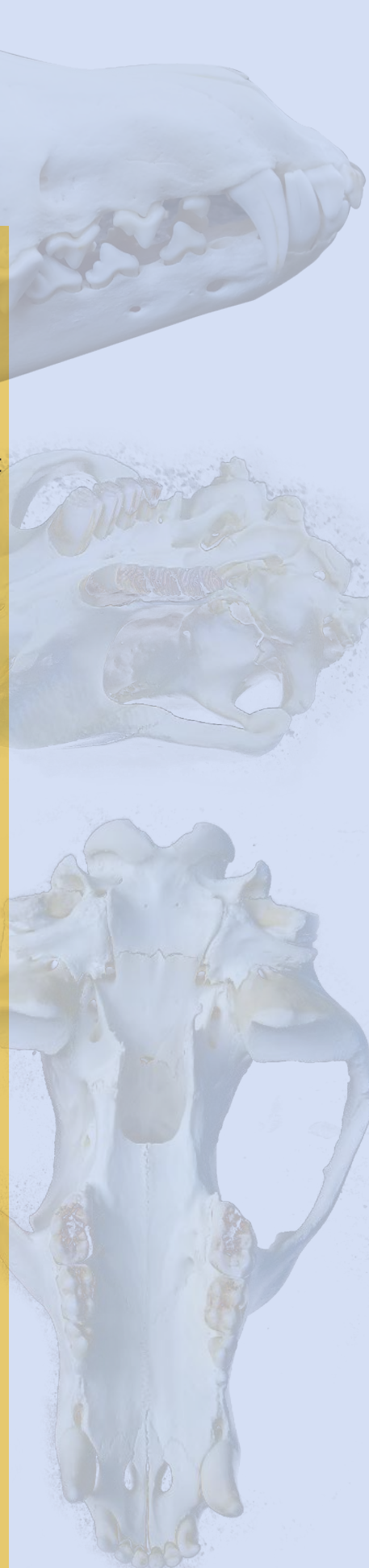
Sharp pointed teeth may work well for meat eaters, but they sure wouldn't help plant eaters. Plant eaters are called herbivores. Plants take a lot of chewing to break down. Just think how long you need to chew celery! Herbivores have tall teeth in the back of their mouths with flat tops. Flat teeth let the animals slide their top and bottom teeth against each other to grind their food.

We have teeth in the back of our mouths with low bumpy crowns; so do bears. Teeth with this shape belong to omnivores. Omnivores eat both meat and plants, so they need teeth that help cut and grind.

The location of the eye sockets on the skull can also tell you a lot. Predators, animals that eat other animals, need to be able to tell distances. This comes in handy when reaching out to grab a mouse. Predators have eyes that face forward. Prey animals, animals that are eaten by other animals, have their eyes located more to the sides of their heads. This lets them look out for danger in almost every direction, without ever moving their heads.

There is a difference between male and female black bear skulls. The skull has something called a sagittal crest. It is a ridge of bone on the top, back part of the skull. This is where muscles used for chewing are attached. Male black bears have a more powerful bite than females and larger muscles. The sagittal crest of male black bears is much bigger than females. It sticks up like the fin on a trout's back.

Looking at these clues may not tell you what animal the skull came from, but it is a start. It may give you an idea of what the animal eats, and whether it is a predator or prey animal.



Photos top to bottom: Coyote skull, Beaver skull, Bear skull CCBY Katie Collins on Flickr.



Be Outside! Springtime Fun

Yay, spring is here! The days are slowly getting longer. You can leave your hat and mittens at home because it's starting to get warmer outside. Spring Break is right around the corner. Now is the time to shake off the winter blahs and spend more time outside. Being outside is so much fun because you can see and do so many things. The world is waking up from its long winter nap. Get outside and see what is happening all around your neighborhood. Here are some fun things to do this spring to enjoy the outdoors:

Climb a tree

Ride your bike

Look for early flowers like daffodils, tulips and dandelions

Check your garden to see if the garlic is coming up

Have a picnic on the first warm day

Listen for the first bird songs of spring

Watch the clouds

Check trees for swelling buds and new leaves

Play an outdoor game with your friends

Go fishing

Take a walk in the spring rain

Use a stethoscope or small glass to listen for the sap rising in cottonwood trees

Listen for frogs singing in a local pond

Stay outside after dark and look at the stars—find the Big and Little Dippers

Build a fort

Read under a tree

Play catch



Photos top to bottom, left to right: Shoshone-Paiute school greenhouse CCBY BLM on Flickr. Big Dipper CCBY Charles Knowles on Flickr. Conservation Lands Trails CCBY BLM on Flickr. Every Kid in a Park, fishing and running over high hills CCBY BLM on Flickr. Catch CCBY Brian Auer on Flickr. Every Kid in a Park, Tree Climbing CCBY BLM on Flickr. Biking trip in downtown Boise CCBY DieselDemon on Flickr. Mock Orange blossom at the ID Botanical Gardens CCBY ulalume on Flickr. Kids hanging out during festival CCBY Tree Fort Music Fest ID on Flickr.

Garlic sprouting CCBY T-Town Photo Booth on Flickr. Pocatello volunteer remediation at Good Enough Creek CCBY BLM Idaho on Flickr.



We love hearing from our readers!

Loralai D. from Remsen, Iowa sent us a letter about how she loves red foxes and what she has learned about them. She asked, “Can foxes be domesticated?”

Well, Loralai, it is important to remember that foxes are wild animals. Some people might try to keep a fox as a pet, but this is usually not a good idea. Foxes can never be fully tamed. They will always have some wildness to them. The food that we feed our pet dogs often doesn't have the right nutrition for a wild dog. Wild animals can get bored and anxious in captivity. They might find ways to entertain themselves, like clawing at the carpet or ripping up the couch. Not Good! It can be difficult keeping wild animals healthy and happy. It is best to keep wild animals in the wild.

Thank you for your question!

Photos left to right: Fox in Valley County, Idaho CCBY Devlyn on Flickr. Red fox in captivity at Zoo Idaho, Pocatello CCBY Chuck Peterson on Flickr.



Black Bear Word Search



Find these words associated with black bears.

- BEAR
- BERRIES
- BLACK
- CARRION
- CAVITY
- CLAWS
- CLIMBING
- CUB
- CURIOUS
- DEN
- FASCINATING
- FAT
- FOREST
- HIBERNATION
- HUNTING
- OMNIVORE
- POWERFUL
- SECRETIVE
- SMELL
- WILD



Z X V W K K F E C V H U H L G
 F P I B C E R A J I O I U D N
 O L B A E O R T B A B T N Y I
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 R J F H B A T M N X R B P F G

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WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

If you have a letter, poem or question for Wildlife Express,

it may be included in a future issue! Send it to:

adare.evans@idfg.idaho.gov

or

Wildlife Express, Idaho Fish and Game

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