



CONTINENTAL BLACK BEAR
CANADA, British Columbia
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PHOTO ENTRY

Schwarzbär (G), *Ours noir*, *Baribal* (F). The American black bear has been divided into two subspecies; Continental (Inland) Black Bear and the Coastal (Pacific) Black Bear. The division was made because the Coastal Black Bear is, on average, bigger than the Continental (Inland) Black Bear. This is due to the rich and ubiquitous food source of fish, mostly salmon.

The American black bear is the only bear endemic to North America and has the largest population of any bear in the world.

DESCRIPTION (*male*) Head and body length 4-1/2 to 6 feet (1.4 to 1.8 m). Tail length 4-5 inches (10.2 to 12.7 cm). Shoulder height 28-37 inches (70-94 cm). Weight 200-300 pounds (90-135 kg), occasionally much more. In parts of the eastern United States where food is abundant, individuals have weighed 500 or even 600 pounds (227-272 kg). Females average about 20 percent smaller than males. Chromosome count is 74.

The smallest North American bear, its name refers to the most common color phase, which is a uniform black with a brown muzzle and often a splash of white on the chest. Other color phases, which usually occur in western parts of North America, vary through several shades of brown to a pale cinnamon. Several color phases can occur in the same geographic area or even in the same litter. The so-called **glacier bear** (given the subspecific name *emmonsii* by Dall in 1895) is a rare bluish-gray color phase that occurs only near Yakutat, Alaska, where it provides limited hunting opportunities. Rarest color phase is the all-white (but not albino) **Kermode bear** (named *kermodei* by Hornaday in 1905) found only on islands off the northwest coast of British Columbia and protected by law. These are now regarded as color phases only; neither *emmonsii* nor *kermodei* is considered a valid subspecies today.

Compared to a brown or grizzly bear, a black bear's back is straight instead of humped, its nose is pointed, its profile is straight, its ears are large and erect, its claws are much shorter and more curved, and the hairs of its coat are shorter.

BEHAVIOR Like other bear species, the black bear is solitary except when mating, or when a sow is with her cubs. It is territorial, tending to avoid others even where territories overlap. Will congregate at a common food source, such as a garbage dump or berry patch, but even so will stay out of each other's way. Mating season is June and July. The female usually gives birth in alternate years, mainly in January and February, with 2-3 cubs being born in the den. Cubs stay with the mother 1-1/2 years, sometimes 2-1/2 years.

Life expectancy is 25-30 years.

Omnivorous, although more a vegetarian than a meat-eater, favoring grasses, sedges, bark, roots, buds, nuts, berries, fruit, honey, insects and rodents. Eats carrion when available, kills small mammals occasionally and sometimes kills domestic stock and is becoming the main predator of deer in some states. Dens during the winter in colder regions, but may not do so in warmer southern areas. A fast runner, able to maintain 25 mph (40 km/h) for a long distance. An excellent tree climber-the only North American bear that, as an adult, can still climb trees. A powerful swimmer. Senses of smell and hearing are very good, eyesight is adequate. Intelligent, shy, secretive and yet inquisitive. Generally harmless to man except when wounded or protecting its young; however,

attacks on humans-with some fatalities-occur with some regularity, especially in closed hunting areas.

HABITAT Mainly forest and woodland at all elevations. Unlike the grizzly, it is able to coexist with humans and is commonly found near large metropolitan areas. As grizzly bear range shrinks from expanding civilization, that of the black bear expands to occupy the vacated areas.

DISTRIBUTION All of Alaska and Canada except the high arctic and the west coast; much of the western United States, extending into Mexico; throughout the Great Lakes region, New England, Appalachia and the Ozarks; also in Florida and adjacent Gulf Coast areas.

REMARKS One of North America's most common and adaptable big game animals. Most black bears are probably bagged as targets of opportunity while hunting other game, such as deer. Also hunted by baiting (where lawful), with the hunter concealed nearby in a blind or tree stand (this is the method favored by bow-hunters). For bait, some experts prefer bakery goods-especially sweets-instead of traditional slaughterhouse offal or fish. But probably the surest hunting method is by trailing with a pack of hounds (where lawful). A fat or aged bear, or one just out of hibernation with soft feet, will soon play out and tree; but one in good condition has far more stamina than a cougar or jaguar, and will frequently escape the dogs. The sport in bear hunting with hounds is in training the dogs and watching them work, and in following them (or trying to) while the bear is run. Once a bear has treed, it is a good idea to stalk it and shoot from concealment, because the bear will often break from the tree when it senses the hunter's approach.

TAXONOMIC NOTES As many as 16 subspecies are listed. Other than color variations, which are inconclusive.

