



Bear Facts

Bear Cubs

Bears usually mate in May and June; however, the fertilized egg does not get established and begin to grow in the womb until the fall. This is called delayed implantation. The delay ensures the cubs are born when the mother is hibernating in the den. This helps to ensure the survival of both mother and cub. Cubs are usually born in January or February, in the warm protection of the den.

The cubs are about twenty centimeters long when they are born, and they weigh from 225 to 450 grams; they are about the size of a kitten. Cubs are born with blue-grey eyes, which change to brown in four to six months. Newborn cubs remain alert and active, and curl or snuggle next to their mother throughout the hibernation period.



The mother provides very rich milk, which the cubs nurse on for three or four months while she is hibernating. When they leave the den, the mother bear sits in an upright position while she is nursing. The cubs make low, murmuring sounds and will whimper like children when they are in distress. The cubs continue to nurse for up to a year after hibernation ends. Cubs become independent at about one and a half years old. The means mother and cubs can spend two winters in the den together.

Female black bears usually give birth to twins rather than triplets or single cubs. But they can have as many as four cubs. Older, heavier mothers tend to have larger litters. The cubs get nourishment from their mother's milk and emerge from the den in the warmth of the spring ready to explore their new world.

There is a strong bond between a mother bear and her cubs. She gives all of her natural tendencies of nursing, warmth and snuggling, as well as discipline, such as a growl or swat from her paw to her young. Cubs are very obedient to their mothers. If alarmed, a mother bear will give a deep awwhoof sound, warning her cubs to scamper up the nearest tree. Never very far away, she will give a few simple grunts to come down.

The cubs usually become independent from their mother between seventeen and eighteen months of age. The mothers and fathers live apart except during the brief mating period. Male bears are not involved in rearing their off-spring and can actually be a predator on young cubs.

Cubs are truly explorers. Once outside the den, life is full of surprises. Everything they see, smell or touch is a new experience. They can be seen

sticking their noses in every nook and cranny, and chasing birds and butterflies. Cubs will mimic their mother in everything she does, learning much of their behavior from her.

Cub's favorite pastimes are wrestling, exchanging bear hugs and playing tag. They like to roll topsy-turvy, somersaulting and cart-wheeling over each other. They sometimes roll down a hill, ending up in a tangle of fur and paws. All of this play develops skills and strength for the time that they will fend for themselves in the forest.

Bear Behavior

Native people called them "bear people." Bears stand on the soles and heels of their feet as humans do and they will walk upright for short distances. When bears stand, it is usually

Elysia Resort, on Quesnel Lake, British Columbia, Canada
Website: www.elysiaresort.com E-mail: rainbow@elysiaresort.com

Bear Facts

to get a better look around and to sniff the air for intruders. Bears have a highly developed sense of smell. They are much more dependent on this sense, rather than their eyes or ears, for identification of other animals, food sources and danger.

Bears will stand with their backs against a tree and rub back and forth, scratching and shedding their winter coats. Black bears are good swimmers and excellent tree climbers. Grizzlies and polar bears do not climb trees.

The language of bears includes both body and vocal signals. Each position or sound sends a specific message to other bears. A sign of aggression may be shown by a lowered head position, flattened ears, head swung back and forth, or vocal sounds, such as grunts, snorts, bellowing or clicks made by opening and closing their mouths. All bears can be dangerous and should be given room and treated with respect.

Bears' Diet

In spring, bears feed on sedges, grass-like plants found near wet ground or water. Grasses, skunk cabbage, roots and insects also constitute a large part of their spring diet. Searching for food takes up much of a bear's time. Wildflowers become summer treats, while wild berries become an important food source at this time. Surprisingly, the bears are quite delicate as they carefully pick flowers and berries with their lips.

September and October are very important months in British Columbia's coastal bears. Many thousands of salmon are returning from the sea and are migrating back to spawn in the streams and rivers where they were hatched. Coastal bears depend almost entirely on the salmon to survive their winter denning. The bears eat from dawn to dusk, consuming about 20,000 calories every day to build up layers of fat for nutrition and to thicken their coats for warmth in preparation for their long hibernation. They can gain more than twenty kilograms in a few weeks, but will lose 30 to 40 percent of their body weight during the long sleep.

All bears are intelligent and curious. They investigate any possible food source, learn quickly, can remember the location of a good source and return to it after many years. Bears are omnivores - they will eat both plants and animals. Bears eat and graze constantly and are always on the move searching for 'green salad' and berries; even the smallest insect is a treat. For coastal

bears, salmon are an important part of their diet.

Initially the bears catch some salmon before they spawn; but once spawned out, the dying salmon are easy prey. Bears have been observed swimming and fishing underwater. Bears often gather below waterfalls to catch salmon; the fish are forced to slow down as they try to jump the falls. Often a leaping salmon is grabbed by a bear and becomes part of its dinner. Sometimes the bear will carry this nourishing and rich meal into the forest to a safe place, away from larger bears who may want the food themselves. The remains of these rotting fish in the forest nourish the plants and insects. In streams the dead fish provide food for the new salmon fry.



Hibernation

Unlike other hibernating animals, bears do not eliminate bodily wastes during months of sleep. In other mammals, urea (containing nitrogen) must be eliminated in urine or it will build up to toxic levels, causing death. The waste products of bears, however, are broken down by the kidneys and liver into building blocks needed for the creation of proteins.

In all animals, including humans, living bones need daily exercise like standing or walking. This weight-bearing movement stimulates the production of more bone, which keeps the skeleton strong and flexible. After even a few days without exercise, bones start to lose calcium and phosphorus. Bedridden people, the elderly and astronauts in space all experience bone loss. This loss causes bones to become thin and brittle, which results in easy breaks and poor healing.

The hibernating bear alone among all species on earth can go for two to six months while hardly moving and not lose any bone mass. The bear does lose calcium and phosphorus from its bones, but a hormone signal retrieves the lost minerals from the blood and replaces them into bone. Because of the bear's unique physiology, its hibernation is one of the most efficient and unusual survival mechanisms in the natural world.

With the shorter days and the first snow of winter, the bears enter its den for the long hibernation until spring. The bear curls into a small ball and within days its body functions change. Its heartbeat slows down, but the bear is kept warm, by its heavy winter coat. It gets all the water and food energy it needs, about 4,000 calories a day, from its fat reserves. It gets protein from its muscles and by reprocessing its body and waste products.

Elysia Resort, on Quesnel Lake, British Columbia, Canada
Website: www.elysiaresort.com E-mail: rainbow@elysiaresort.com