



# TRAILS OF DISCOVERY

## BEAR QUEST

A Student's Guide to Alaska's Brown & Black Bears

### BEAR FACTS

Brown bears, or grizzlies as they are sometimes known, live almost everywhere in Alaska. They come in all shapes and sizes. A female weighs between 250 and 600 pounds, a grown male from 600 to over 1000 pounds. Brown bears come in different colors. Some are almost black and some are very blond. Brown bears have a hump between their shoulders and have slightly concave or "dish shaped" faces. They also have long, straight front claws for digging. Why do brown bears dig? What might they find to eat in a burrow under the ground?

Black bears live in the three-fourths of Alaska where there are trees. Most black bears are black but some are brown or even silver gray. Their "Roman" or straight noses and lack of a hump makes them look different than brown bears. Black bears are smaller than brown bears and have short curved claws for climbing. Females weigh between 100 and 250 pounds and males 200 to 400. Why are black bears such excellent climbers? Where do black bear cubs go if they sense danger?

Brown bears are adult, or almost full grown, when they are six or seven years old. Black bears are full grown when they are three or four. How old will you be when you are called a grown up? Bears begin to look very old when they are in their twenties. Some bears may live for 30 years or more.

BLACK

BROWN



## AN ALASKAN BEAR STORY

Alaska is a big, beautiful state with many kinds of plants and animals, and a wide variety of places where bears live. Brown bears share the tundra of northern Alaska with millions of nesting birds and thousands of caribou. In the forests of south-eastern Alaska brown bears and black bears live among giant spruce and hemlock trees. Both types of bears feast on berries in alpine habitat, skunk cabbage in wetlands, and salmon in coastal rivers and streams.

Bears are hard to count but scientists estimate there are about 35,000 brown bears and more than 100,000 black bears in Alaska. This might sound like lots of bears, but did you know that in the entire rest of the United States there are only about 800 to 1000 brown bears left of a

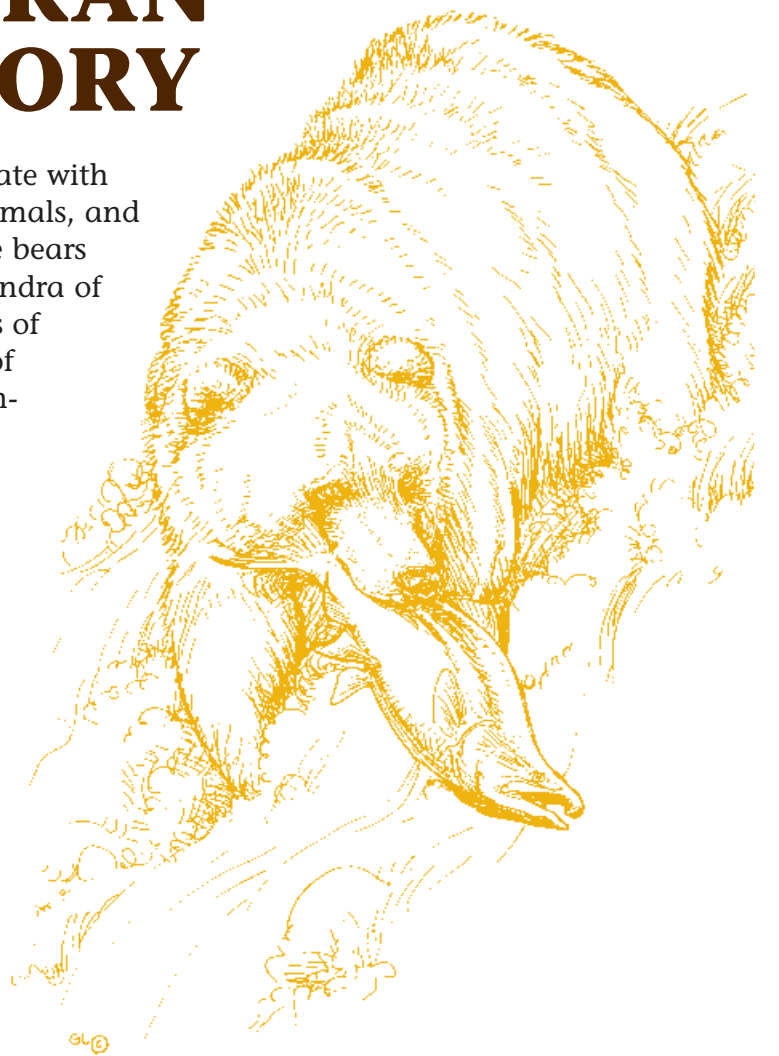
population that once numbered about 50,000? In fact the only places left in the world that have large numbers of brown bears are Alaska, Canada, and Russia.

The main reason there are so few bears now, in places where there were once so many, is loss of bear habitat. A good definition for bear habitat is, the area where bears normally live and can find all the things they need to survive. Bears need food, water, and a secure place where mother bears can raise their cubs safe from threats and disturbance.

People often make many small changes to the places where they live over a long period of time. These changes affect the animals that live nearby. Can you think how the land around you has changed during the last year? Five years? Ten years? Ask your parents and grandparents how the land has changed during their lifetime. Has anything happened that might make bears want to stay away or move somewhere else? Are there new roads or houses where there used to be bear habitat?

The rest of the United States isn't as fortunate as Alaska. Many bear habitats have all but disappeared. Prairies, once the home of millions of buffalo and thousands of grizzly bears, were lost when grasslands were plowed to create fields and farms. Wetland and forest habitats vanished, along with a great many bears, when swamps were drained and trees cut to make way for roads, houses, and towns.

Alaska still has a healthy environment and excellent bear habitat, but this could change quickly. As the number of people grows there will be an increased demand for places to live and for the many natural resources that Alaska holds. We must be very careful not to repeat mistakes that have eliminated bears from other states and countries. We can't make changes that destroy bear habitat and expect bears to exist. In Alaska, we still have the opportunity to work together to protect bears, their habitat, and all the other animals that are so important to us.



# BEAR QUEST

## RANGES

-  BOTH BROWN AND BLACK
-  BROWN ONLY
-  BLACK ONLY

## WHAT KINDS OF BEARS LIVE NEAR YOU?

If you live near McGrath or Circle in interior Alaska you may see a black bear eating willow buds on the banks of the Kuskokwim or Yukon Rivers.

If you live in Anaktuvuk Pass above the Arctic Circle or Nome on the Seward Peninsula you may see a mother brown bear and her cubs chasing and eating arctic ground squirrels on the tundra.

If you live in Anchorage or Eagle River you may see a black or brown bear near Eagle River Visitor Center or maybe even walking down the street where you live.

If you live in Juneau, where black bears are very common, and your family takes boat trips you may see a brown bear eating sedge grass in the tidal flats of Admiralty Island.

On the Kenai Peninsula, you may be lucky enough to see black bears or brown bears fishing along salmon streams.

What kinds of bears live near you?

## BEAR HISTORY

Did you know many scientists believe people and brown bears first came to Alaska over a land bridge that once connected North America and Asia? The brown bears that live in the United States and Canada are just like the brown bears that live in Europe, Russia, and Japan.

Bears have always held a special place in the lives and culture of the Native people of Alaska. The beliefs of Alaska's Native people are a rich part of our cultural heritage.

Early settlers, miners, loggers, trappers, and Russian traders considered bears to be a threat and killed almost every one they saw. Because many people didn't want to see all the bears killed, game regulations, wildlife refuges, and parks were established to make sure there would always be bears and places for them to roam.

## A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF A BEAR

Bears begin life in a winter den in January or February. Bears are tiny and weigh less than a pound when they are born. You could easily hold one in your hand. They grow quickly and leave their winter den by the time they are two or three months old. When they leave the den and follow their mothers, brown bears weigh about 15 pounds and black bears are slightly smaller. Bears come out of their dens in April or May. Older males usually come out first and mothers with newborn cubs come out last.

There isn't much food for bears to eat in the early spring and it can be a very difficult time. Sometimes bears eat caribou, mountain sheep, or moose that died during the winter.

In late spring when a female bear is ready to mate she chases her cubs away. This usually happens when brown bear cubs are two and a half years old and when black bears are a year and a half. These weaned cubs often have a difficult time until they learn to make it on their own. Sometimes these young bears, or sub-adults as they are called, come into contact with people as they look for a place to live.

Summer and early fall are important times for bears to eat and put on fat. This is the time when plants, berries, and salmon are abundant. Bears may feed for twelve or more hours, and then take a short nap. Do you know the names of three different plants that bears like to eat?

In the late fall, when the first snows come and the weather cools, bears dig dens and go into hibernation for five, six, or seven months. During this time, they live off their stored fat and don't eat, drink, defecate, or urinate.



## BEAR COMMUNICATION

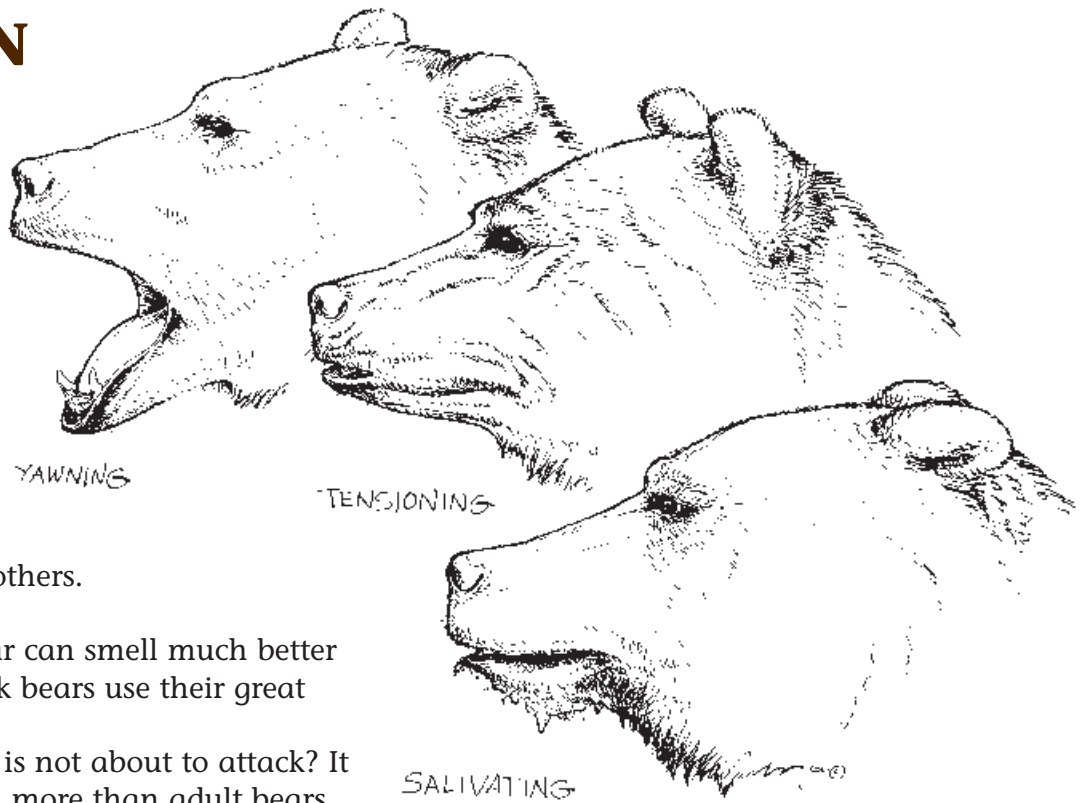
Bears are large and powerful animals. Because they are so strong and could hurt one another they have developed language to show their emotions without hitting and biting. Bears communicate by seeing, touching, vocalizing, and smelling. Which is better, to talk things out, or to punch and bite?

Every so often when bears meet they sniff and nuzzle. Biologists call this a greeting. It is much like when two people get together and shake hands.

Most people don't know that bears sometimes play together. Young bears, like young people, learn about the world and each other, by playing. Cubs like to play with their siblings and with their mothers. Sometimes old bears play with young bears.

Dogs can smell much better than we can and a bear can smell much better than a dog. How well do you smell? How do you think bears use their great sense of smell?

Did you know that a bear standing on its hind legs is not about to attack? It is just trying to get a better look. Cubs stand up much more than adult bears. Could it be that they are shorter and like to stand up so they can look over things? Did you know that bears see at least as well as people?



## HOW PEOPLE AND BEARS ARE THE SAME

In some ways people and bears are the same. People and bears often eat the same foods like moose and salmon. Can you think of other foods both people and bears eat?

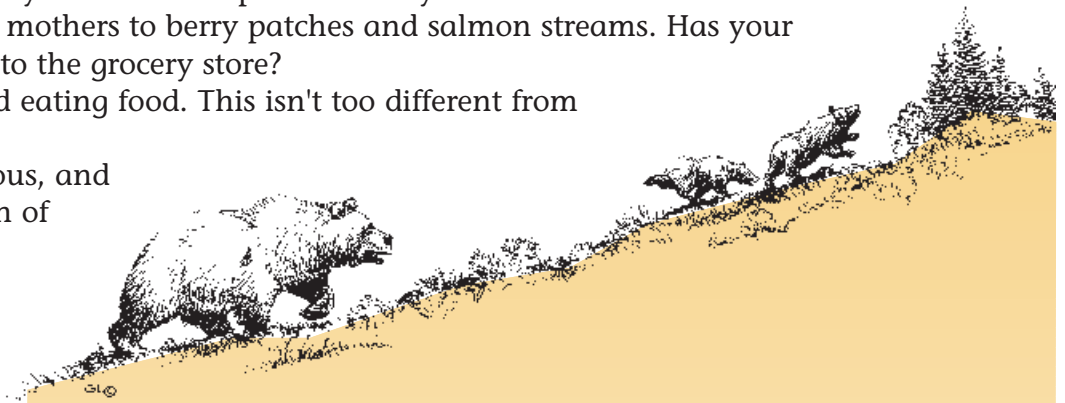
People and bears both like to live in the same places. We both choose to live near streams and rivers. Why do we both like these areas?

Mother bears are protective of their cubs just as your mother is protective of you.

Bear cubs learn to find food by following their mothers to berry patches and salmon streams. Has your mother ever taken you berry picking, fishing, or to the grocery store?

Young bears spend lots of time looking for, and eating food. This isn't too different from how human teenagers spend their time.

Young bears also like to explore, are very curious, and have lots of energy. This sounds like a description of a person in 4th, 5th or 6th grade!



### BEAR BEHAVIOR

Bears are not mean. Bears don't dislike people. Usually they are afraid of us. Unless they have to live near us in order to get food, they almost always choose to avoid us.

Many people think that bears don't get along together. This isn't true. Sometimes bears meet and tell each other who they are and how they feel by using bear language.

Bears are intelligent and curious creatures. Animal trainers find them easy to train, and quick to learn.

## HOW WE CAN HELP BEARS

Preventing bear problems is everyone's responsibility. Everyone should work together to keep garbage, dog food, birdseed, and pets—away from bears.

You can encourage your neighbors not to leave garbage cans out overnight for garbage trucks to pick up the next day. If you live in the country or in the bush you can keep your garbage where bears can't get at it until you can properly dispose of it.

You can always store garbage and animal feed inside secure buildings or in bear-proof containers.

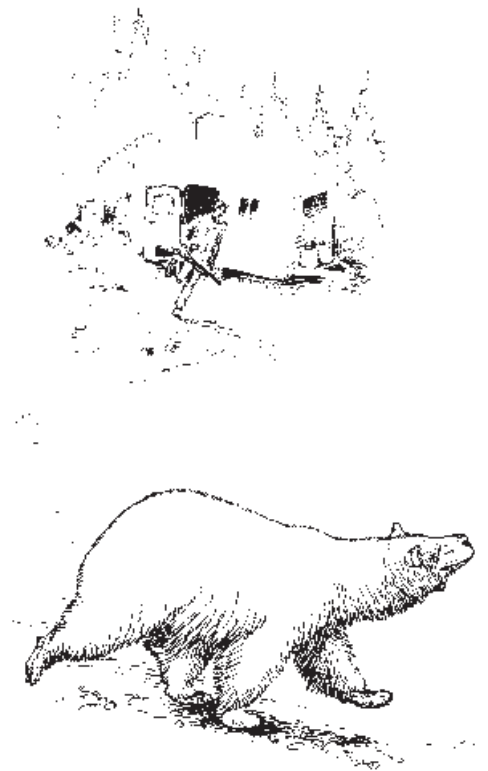
You can keep your domestic animals where they are safe. Bears love to eat chickens and rabbits. Who wants to lose their pets?

Bears, especially black bears, like birdseed and suet. You shouldn't feed birds between April and October. You should also clean up uneaten food and seed hulls each spring when you put feeders away.

## BEARS AND FOOD

Did you know that if a bear gets into garbage it almost always is killed? In addition to salmon and berries, bears like garbage which can be tasty and nutritious. If garbage is too easy for bears to get, garbage-eating can quickly become a habit. Bears seek out the same wild foods in the same places year after year and bears that get used to eating human food behave the same way. They keep coming back to the same houses, neighborhoods, campgrounds, and dumpsters. But garbage-eating is a bad habit because people almost always kill bears who come near them in search of garbage. This is why many people say, "A FED BEAR IS A DEAD BEAR!"

Keeping food away from bears is the most important thing we can do to prevent conflicts and confrontations between bears and people. This will make people safer and helps conserve bears. Did you know that it is against the law to feed bears? One reason for this law is, "FED BEARS CAN BE DANGEROUS BEARS!"



## SAFETY TIPS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Bears are big animals. They are far stronger than the strongest people and they have sharp teeth and claws. A professional football team couldn't hold down a bear. Bears can hurt people, but they rarely do. Here are some tips to help keep you safe.

### Remember the 4 Don'ts:

**Don't Run** Don't EVER run from a bear. If you forget everything else don't forget this safety tip. Bears may try to follow if you run away. Bears can run faster than the fastest humans. Sometimes you can walk very slowly away from a bear, but if the bear follows, stop and stand calmly.

**Don't Approach** Don't EVER approach bears. When you approach a bear, it may be uncertain about what you are trying to do. Sometimes this makes them behave aggressively towards us—something we don't want.

**Don't Threaten** Don't EVER threaten bears—even cubs and young bears. If you want bears to mind their manners—then you must do the same. Don't run towards a bear or attempt to drive it away. Move away from the bear to a safe place, like a building, or simply leave the area, but stop if the bear follows you.

**Don't Throw Things** Throwing rocks, sticks, or snowballs at bears may seem very brave. Actually it is very stupid. Most bears won't hurt you, but if you hurt or scare them—look out!

### Remember the 5 Do's:

**Do Be Calm** It doesn't do any good to become excited if you see a bear nearby or if a bear approaches. Often when bears approach they are trying to learn who and what you are. If you get excited, chances are the bear will too. Curious bears can become frightened and dangerous. Instead of yelling at a bear it is much better to talk to it in a calm voice and let the bear know you are a human and you mean no harm.

**Do Be Careful** Bears don't like to be surprised. If you are walking in trees or brush where you can't see—talk, sing a song, or better yet, clap your hands. Some people like to say, "Hey Bear! Ho Bear!" Let bears know you are near. If bears have been seen where you live or play, be especially alert. Keep your eyes and ears open.

**Do Travel In Groups Of 3 Or Larger** When you are hiking or play in bear country, stay with your friends or family. Bears tend to stay away from groups of people. Groups of people are usually noisy and this helps to alert bears that you are in the area and prevents surprises.

**Do Stay With Your Parents Or Other Adults** Though you may want to run ahead of a group when you are hiking, this is not wise when you are hiking in bear country. Bears are especially respectful of larger people like adults. If you are camping, fishing, hunting or hiking it is always good to carry a whistle or noisemaker so that adults can find you.

**Do Be Prepared** Learn the "Do's" and "Don'ts" so you know how to behave to avoid bears and what to do if you meet a bear while waiting for your school bus, walking to a friend's house, or doing any other activity in bear country.

