

# North American Black Bear

**Scientific Name:** *Ursus americanus*

**Class:** Mammalia

**Order:** Carnivora

**Family:** Ursidae



North American black bears resemble a huge teddy bear. Their color ranges from jet black to gray to brown to blonde. There is even a blue phase. Their length is about 4 to 7 feet, and height on all fours (at the withers) is 2-3 feet. American black bears have small eyes, round ears, and short tails. They reach adult size at 4 years, at which time females range from 90-300 pounds and males range from 125-500 pounds. The bears have a brown muzzle and occasionally a white to cinnamon V-shaped blaze on their chest. They have color vision, movable lips, long prehensile tongues, and strong curved claws. They climb trees easily. Black bears bite and claw trees. It is believed this habit is to mark trails and establish boundaries. Black bears are curious, but their encounters with humans and human garbage can be extremely dangerous. The Kermode bear or the "ghost bear" of the Pacific Northwest is one of a "blonde" (white) color phase sometimes found in litters of differing colors. The size of the bear cub at birth is the smallest of any placental mammal, relative to the weight of the mother. This ratio would be comparable to that of a human child weighing about 5 ounces at birth.

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## Range

Across Alaska and Canada down to Mexico and Florida

## Habitat

Temperate hardwood and boreal coniferous forests

## Gestation

10 weeks

## Litter

Average is 2, range is 1-5 cubs

## Behavior

North American black bears are the world's most adaptable large carnivores. They are intelligent, strong, and agile, and eat almost anything, including human garbage. They tend to sleep during the day, and they feed in the early morning and late evening. Bears establish a home range covering 20 square miles for females and over 40 square miles for males. In northern climates, all female black bears and many male black bears hibernate. In warmer regions, depending on the availability of food, bears hibernate intermittently.

## Reproduction

Females attain sexual maturity at 3 years of age, on the average. North American bears usually mate in the spring and the female's den in the fall. If the female is in peak condition (with enough stored fat) when she goes into her winter den, the embryo will start to develop. At the end of a 2-month gestation period, the cubs are born in January or February. The cubs weigh 240 to 330 g (0.5 to .7lb) at birth and develop to about 4 to 8 pounds after emerging from the den. The cubs stay with their mother for a year, and then start out on their own by the next winter.

## Wild Diet

Omnivorous: high-energy food, including fish, amphibians, small mammals, insects, plants, fruits, etc.