

2: Black Bears



Areas where black bears are commonly seen.

There are eight species of bears in the world. In North America there are three — the American black bear, the grizzly bear, and the polar bear. The most dangerous living creatures in North America are humans and then domestic dogs. I have fought with and been injured by both humans and dogs, but I have never fought, or been injured by, a bear.

Black bears are a massive, bulky animal that can grow up to five feet (one and a half meters) in length. Their normal weight is around 200 pounds (ninety kilograms), however bears eating a very rich diet, such as salmon, can weigh much more.



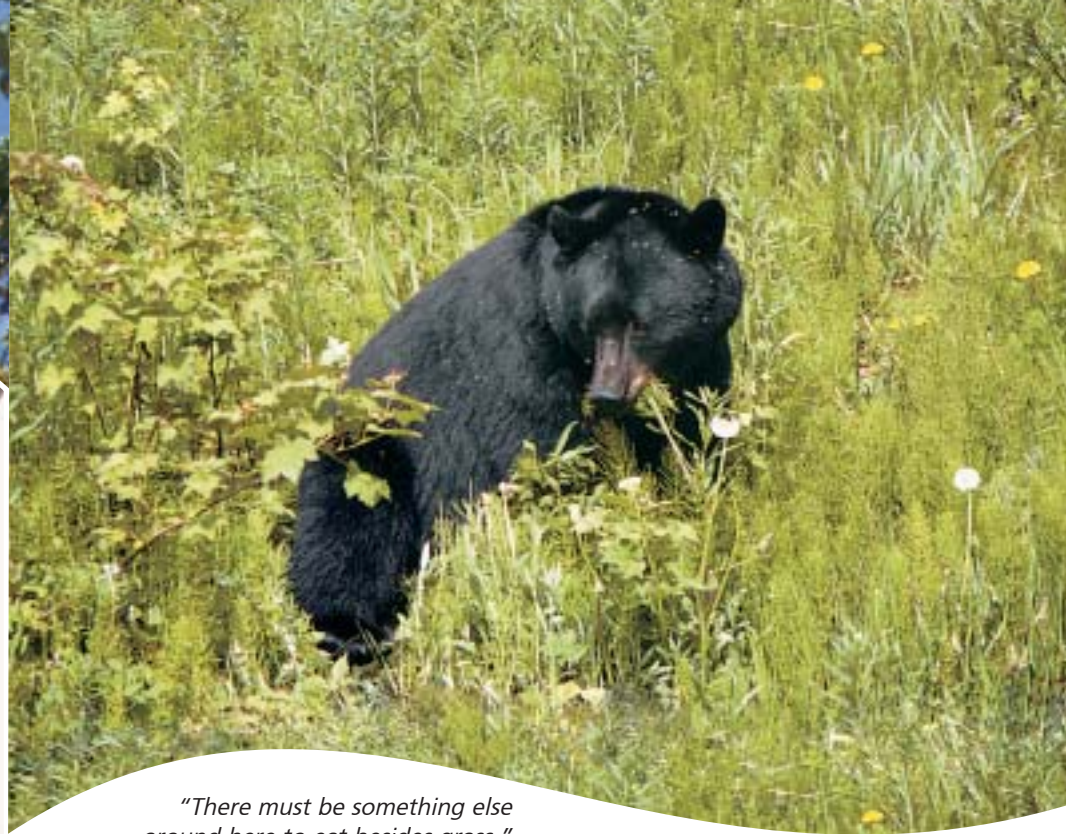
Black bears are usually charcoal black and many of them have a patch of white fur on their chest. They can be light or dark brown, white, or even black with a blue tint to their fur. Most bears that are light and dark brown in color are in the Rocky Mountains and west of that.

Black bears have a straight profile, a tapered, sensitive nose and a long tongue that is good for licking up insects and eating small berries.



"Hold on really tight."

"I never knew people could climb trees. Keith, what are you doing?"




"There must be something else around here to eat besides grass."

At every age black bears are good tree climbers, excellent swimmers, and they can run at speeds of more than thirty-five miles (fifty-six kilometers) an hour.

Black bears will eat almost anything. Vegetation makes up the largest part of their diet. They also eat nuts, insects, fish, small mammals, birds, eggs, honey, berries, carrion, and human food. Black bears can smell much better than humans. At times they will stand on their hind legs sniffing the air and focusing their eyes on whatever is in the area. The bear's large, round ears are well developed and extremely sensitive. Normally black bears are very quiet animals. They will make woofing sounds and whimper. Cubs will cry almost like human babies. Occasionally they will growl. Staring and body movements are very much a part of their language.



"I know you are around here."




"Give me more room."

Black bears are sexually mature between the ages of three and four. The most active time for mating is May through June.




"Did I see you with another bear yesterday?"
"No, I wasn't me."

During late October or early November in the northern regions a black bear will dig a hole in the ground, usually on a hillside, then crawl into it and go to sleep. Instead of a hole, a black bear may crawl into a hollow of a tree, a cave, under some rocks or a camp, or even under a pile of leaves.



"You stay there and fish."



"Is anybody home?"



"I told you to stay there and I meant it."