



Asiatic black bear

Ursus thibetanus

Description: The Asiatic black bear is a medium sized bear with a body length of 50 to 74 inches and weighing between 220 and 440 pounds. Females are smaller than males. They are normally blackish in color, with lighter muzzles and a distinct V-shaped patch of cream colored fur on their chest. A brown phase also occurs. The ears of an Asiatic black bear appear much larger than those of other bear species.

Range: They are found in Southern Asian in a now greatly reduced and fragmented range. The western edge of the range was formerly Afghanistan across Pakistan, eastward over northern India and southern China, northern Indochina and northeastern China, former eastern Soviet Union, Korea and Japan.



Habitat: Asiatic black bears prefer heavily forested areas, particularly in the hills and mountains and moist tropical forests below alpine elevations. In the summer they may be found up at altitudes of 10,00 feet and will descend to lower altitudes in the winter. It is known that they den up for winter sleep in the colder areas of their range but it is not known if they do this where their range is consistently warm.

Diet: Asiatic black bears are omnivorous eating insects, small mammals and birds, carrion, bee nests, and fruit. They have been reported to kill domestic livestock but the

actual number of occurrences is unknown. In fall they will frequent nut-producing trees where they will eat from self-constructed leaf and branch nests or platforms.

Social Organization: Little is known about this bear in the wild. They are mainly nocturnal, sleeping in caves or trees during the greater part of the day. They may have established territories of 4 to 8 square miles.

Reproduction: Females become sexually mature at about 4 years of age. While little is known about these bears in the wild, it is believed they have delayed implantation. In captivity, cubs are born in December or January. They weaned at about six months but may remain with the mother for up to three years. Females in the wild have been seen to travel with cubs of distinctly different ages.

Conservation Status: The Asiatic black bear is listed as Appendix I in CITES.

Threats to Survival: The Asiatic black bear's range is now comprised of highly isolated and non-contiguous areas of land, all subject to human encroachment. Furthermore, the Asiatic black bear has the unfortunate distinction of being the bear species most favored by the Asian medicinal market for its organs potency. The Asiatic black bear has been devastated by poachers and is at very real risk of extinction throughout most of its range in the near future.

Zoo Programs: The existing North American captive Asiatic black bear population is an unknown, with few animals, many of varying subspecies, and is considered unsuitable to manage for genetic success. It is the recommendation of the AZA Bear Advisory Group that these animals not be bred and the space left by these animals be used for AZA Species Survival Plan bears. CBSG has recommended that Japan concentrate their conservation efforts on this highly endangered bear species.

Asiatic black bears now in North American zoo collections should be used for contraceptive trials to benefit all bear species. Woodland Park Zoo and the USFWS forensics laboratory are working together on a genetic analysis of the North American population. All medical and necropsy reports should be sent to the AZA Bear Advisory Group veterinary advisor for future reference. Zoos holding Asiatic black bears should stress the educational message of the impact of illegal hunting and the trade of bear parts to the Asian medicinal market.