



## North American black bear

*Ursus americanus*

Description: The American black bear is a medium size bear, weighing between 130 and 660 pounds with a total body length of 50 to 75 inches.

The black bear can be found in many color phases from black, chocolate brown, cinnamon brown, pale blue (known as glacier bears) to white (known as Kermode bears). A black bear will often have a brown muzzle and may have a lighter color patch on its chest. Its feet are equipped with strong, highly curved claws.

Range: American black bears are found in North America; in 32 states of the United States, all provinces and territories of Canada except Prince Edward Island, and northern Mexico.



Habitat: Black bears prefer forested areas from sea level to altitudes of up to 6500 feet. Their choice of habitat is always one that keeps them away from contact with brown bears, a much larger competitor species.

Diet: Black bears are omnivores; eating nuts, berries, fruits, acorns, roots, grasses and other plant matter, insects (especially ants), deer and moose fawns, carrion and in coastal areas on spawning salmon.

Social Organization: Black bears are usually solitary animals except females with young. A pair may come together for several days during mating season and in time of abundant food, several bears may feed closely together with little interaction. Male bears keep large territories that overlap the smaller ranges of several females. Bears will leave

territorial signposts both through scent marking and by leaving long claw marks in tree bark.

Reproduction: Females reach sexual maturity at 3 to 4 years of age and mating will take place in June, July and August. Pairs may come together for a few hours or several days, copulating many times. Gestation is approximately 220 days and the cubs are born in their mother's winter den in January or February. Cubs are weaned at around 8 months but may remain with their mother for a year and a half.

Conservation Status: CITES lists the American black bear as Appendix II.

Threats to Survival: While the black bear is currently listed as safe through most of its current range, the very real threat exists of loss due to illegal poaching for the Asian medicinal market.

Zoo Programs: As this genus is one of two considered stable, no captive breeding is recommended at this time. As current American black bear space is vacated, this space should go to other bear species involved in AZA Species Survival Plans unless it is used for a specific American black bear educational and zoogeographical exhibit. These exhibits and their corresponding graphics should be used in educational presentations for more public awareness on the impact of illegal hunting and trade of bear parts to Asia. Some contraceptive work is being done with American black bears to benefit all bear species.