

# Species Spotlight

## Bears

### Symbol of Renewal

The bear has been part of our stories and mythology since earliest human civilization. Remains of bear shrines have been dated back to the Neanderthal age. Siberian, Greek, Scandinavian, Celtic, Mongol, Norse and Native American traditions all honor the bear. Common themes run through these myths and rituals, including renewal, initiation and bravery.

Three species of bears inhabit the U.S. American Black Bears, as the name suggests, are usually black, but can also be cinnamon, blond or even white or bluish gray. They can live more than thirty years in the wild and are highly adaptable, which may explain why these are the most common species of bear found in the U.S.

How can you tell a brown bear from a black? The brown has humped shoulders, an upturned snout, longer fur and longer claws. The size and color of brown bears varies from region to region. Those with grizzled coats living in the West are called “grizzly” bears, while those from the Northwest are called “Kodiak” bears. The greatest concentrations of grizzly bears are Yellowstone and Glacier National Park.

Polar bears, the world’s largest land predators, live in northernmost Alaska. Their fur is not actually white, but comprised of hollow, transparent hairs that scatter and reflect visible light, much like snow. This fur (and a layer of blubber as thick as 4.5 inches) insulates polar bears so well, they emit almost no heat. Polar bears in captivity have demonstrated high levels of intelligence; Some scientists say that their ability to construct elaborate structures and break ice to obtain fish demonstrate an intelligence equal to primates.

Fear, misunderstanding and ignorance have tapped much of our respect and reverence for bears. No other predator species, except perhaps the wolf, has been so reviled by society. And so needlessly killed. Predator Defense is working to promote nonlethal solutions for nuisance bears and teach people in bear-prone areas how to safely coexist with these intelligent and fascinating predators. ♦



*The Grizzly Bear is actually one variety of the Brown Bear species*



### Bear Facts

- Number of grizzlies roaming the lower 48 states in 1850: more than 100,000. Number of grizzlies today: approximately 1,100, restricted to less than 2% of their former range.
- Polar Bears’ “white” fur is really comprised of transparent, hollow hairs that reflect light in much the same way that transparent ice or snow can appear white.
- Bears molt, shedding their fur and regrowing it each year.
- The only bear species that hibernate are the brown bear, the black bear and the Asiatic Black Bear.
- Most bear deaths are caused by humans killing bears.
- Male bears are called boars. Females are called sows.
- All bear species can survive up to six months in the winter without food or water.
- All bear cubs are blind at six weeks old.
- A polar bear’s claws can grow six inches long.
- Sloth bears, a species found in India, are the only bears that carry their young on their back.