



WILD WONDERS



Brown Bears, Black Bears and Polar Bears, Oh My!

Living in Alaska, there is a good chance that you may see a bear, but even if you don't, you will never be far from one. Did you know, Alaska is the only state where all three North American bears are found! Alaska is home to black bears, brown bears and polar bears. Bears are very important to the ecosystem and to Alaska's communities. Inside this issue you can learn about the life cycle of bears, bear behavior, and how to live responsibly in bear country.

What's Inside

- Alaska's Three Bears
- Bear Behavior
- Living With Bears
- Exciting Bear Research
- Fun Activities





Brown Bears

Brown bears are brown right? Not always! Brown bears are also known as grizzly bears in some parts of the state and come in a wide variety of colors. Brown bears can range in color from light cream to almost black. Depending on how much food is available, adult brown bears can weigh anywhere from 250 pounds to more than 1,000 pounds. That's heavier than a piano! The average height of a brown bear standing on its hind legs is six feet. Brown bears have a hump of muscle between their shoulders. This, combined with large paws and long claws, give brown bears the power to be excellent diggers.

Blonde Brown Bear

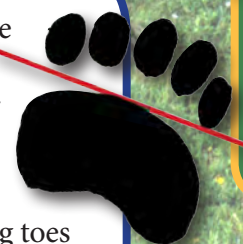


Grizzly

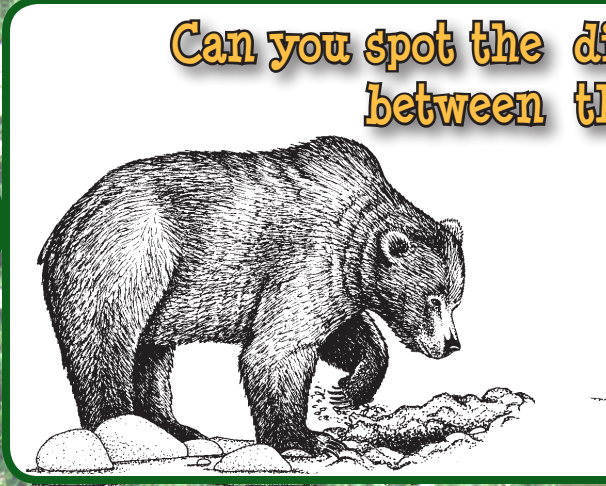


Brown bears are large animals that require lots of personal space. Adult brown bears tend to spend most of their time alone, but often fish near other bears when they are feeding along streams filled with nutritious salmon.

Brown bears have robust, closely spaced or touching toes that form a relatively straight toe arc. Front claws measure about three inches long, and claw marks are usually more than twice as long as the toe pads.



Sniff...
Sniff... I can smell food over a mile away!



Black Bears



Did you know? Not all black bears are black! Just like brown bears, black bears come in many different color phases. They may be bluish white (glacier bear), brown (cinnamon), black or even white! White black bears are very unique and rarely seen in Alaska.

Black bears have longer and less rounded ears than brown bears. Their faces are straighter from their forehead to their nose and they rarely have the muscular hump on their back. Black bears are the smallest of Alaska's bears, averaging about five feet tall when standing and weighing about 350 pounds.

All bears have good eyesight and hearing. They are also equipped with an amazing sense of smell!

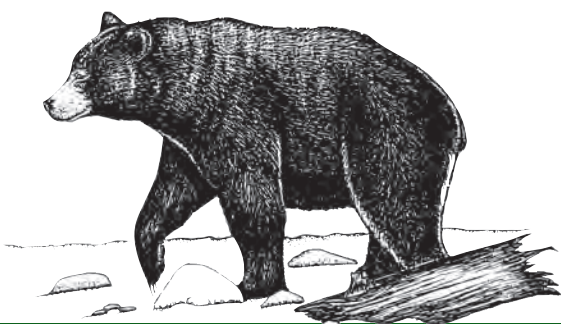
Brown bears and black bears are both omnivores. They are opportunistic and will eat almost anything that is available to them. Their diet consists of insects, plants, berries, sedges, fish and sometimes mammals such as deer, moose and caribou. Bears are a key part of the ecosystem. When bears eat salmon, they often drag their catch out of the water to eat. Salmon leftovers feed other animals and also put nutrients into the soil, fertilizing the forest.

Glacier Bear

Cinnamon Bear

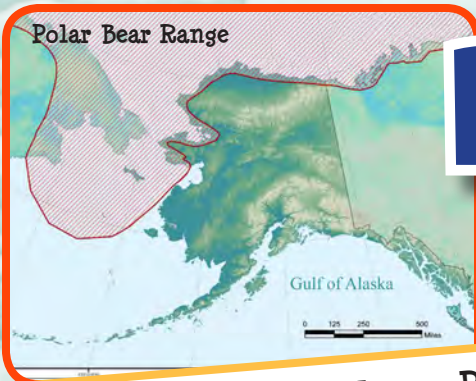


What are the differences between the brown and black bear?



Black bears have sharply curved claws that can be up to two inches long, allowing them to climb trees in the forests where they live. The toes on the front foot form a greater arc compared to brown bears. The toes also have more space between them than a brown bear.





Polar Bears

Brrr! It's cold up here. Polar bears live in the remote arctic environment and are always associated with snow and ice.



Ahh... Cold and chilly, just the way I like it!

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The plight of the polar bear
 Due to increasing temperatures, polar bears are being forced to adapt. Melting sea ice is forcing polar bears to move farther inland and is making it difficult for them to obtain the food they need to survive.

Have you heard?
 Unlike brown and black bears, most polar bears stay awake throughout winter. Pregnant females will make a den in the snow to give birth to her cubs, and then emerge in March or early April. Other polar bears typically don't make dens like pregnant females. Instead they roam the snow and ice year-round in search of food.



USFWS



A polar bear's diet is mainly ringed seals and bearded seals. They also scavenge on whale carcasses, bird eggs, walrus and sometimes beluga whales!

Did you know? A polar bear is a marine mammal!
 That's right! Polar bears are protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act. Polar bears rely on the arctic sea ice and are specially adapted for living in a marine environment. A polar bear's warm coat may appear white, but each hair is actually a clear hollow tube that has no color at all. Polar bears have black skin and a layer of fat about four inches thick. They also have large, paddle-like feet to propel them through cold water and help distribute their weight on ice. The average male stands between 8 and 11 feet tall and weighs from 500 to 1,000 pounds. The largest polar bear was 11 feet tall when standing and weighed 2,210 pounds! This makes the polar bear the largest of any species of bear. Wow!





Bear Behavior

Bears communicate in their own way

In many ways, a bear's behavior is much more predictable than you might think. A bear's ears can be a good indicator of its emotions. Flattened ears can mean an angry or frightened bear, while ears that stand up can mean that the bear is curious and trying to hear something better. And just like us, bears have personal space. You should never approach a bear, especially if they have food or cubs. Bears are defensive of their food and cubs, and may react when threatened. Often times bears may false charge. A bear may rush in close, then come to a screeching halt or avoid contact by going around the person or animal. Always give bears plenty of space and remember to tell an adult if you see a bear.

Bear nice to meet you

We can learn from bear behavior: Bear experts say you can learn a lot about how to act around bears by learning about how bears behave around other bears. For example, dogs salivate when they are hungry, but for a bear, salivation can be a sign of stress!

Compare Yourself to a Bear!

Choose brown, black or polar bear

	You	Bear
Height:		
Weight:		
Claws:		
Favorite Food:		
Habitat:		
Behavior:		



Bear Talk

Match each photo to the bear's behavior

Find the answers on page 6

A Bear doesn't know what you are and is using all of its senses to try and figure it out.

B Bear is chasing salmon, and does not appear to be disturbed or agitated.

C Bear is showing stress by vocalizing and frothing at the mouth.

D Bear is aggressively charging with ears pinned back against its head.

Living and Traveling in Bear Country

Alaska is Bear Country!

Whether you live in a rural or urban area of Alaska you are in bear country. The privilege of living in a state with large predators comes with responsibilities. Remember to keep the garbage at your home secure and maintain a clean campsite. Your behavior can influence bear behavior and keep them out of trouble. It is important to learn as much as you can about living and camping in bear country so that you, and the bears, can live safely together.

Many bears live in Alaska and many people enjoy the outdoors, but surprisingly few people see bears and only a few of those are ever threatened by a bear. Bears are curious, intelligent, naturally shy animals and prefer to avoid people. However, conflicts can arise when they are attracted to human food or garbage or when we surprise them while out on the trail.

Respecting bears and learning proper behavior can help you avoid conflict—and help you know how to react if you do see a bear.

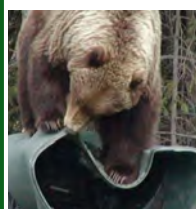
Scan the QR code to watch **Hey Bears!** and learn more about how YOU can stay safe in bear country.



You can find more information and view the video at www.alaskabears.alaska.gov



Can you identify items around your home that might attract bears?



Yes No
 Is there any trash outside your home that is not stored in a bear-resistant container, garage or shed?

Yes No
 Do you put fish or meat scraps in your compost pile?



Yes No
 Are there any bird feeders out during the months when bears are most likely to be awake (April 1 - November 15)?

Yes No
 Is there any leftover birdseed on the ground?



Yes No
 Is there any pet food stored outside where bears might get it?

Yes No
 Do you have any livestock on your property (chickens, ducks, goats, horses, beehives) that are not protected by an electric fence?



Yes No
 Do you keep fish waste outside your home in non bear-resistant garbage cans?

Yes No
 Do you have any fishy-smelling gear or fish cleaning tables outside your home?

Yes No
 Do you leave your fish smoker unattended?



Yes No
 Do you have any freezers outside that might provide easy access for bears?

Yes No
 Does your BBQ have leftover food or grease on it?

If you answered "yes" to any of the questions please visit www.alaskabears.alaska.gov and find out how you can make your home and neighborhood safer. Thank you for your time and effort.

You surprised a bear, now what?

When you surprise a bear up close in the wilderness, stay calm. **DON'T TURN AND RUN.** Move closer to your friend.

The bear may come closer, stand upright to get a better look, or circle around you to get your scent.



Wave your arms slowly and talk calmly to the bear. Help it figure out what you are.

The bear may talk to you in its own language... popping its teeth, huffing and growling... telling you to go away.



Leave slowly, staying close to your friend... always facing the bear.

If the bear follows you, stop, stand your ground, and call for help.



Enjoy watching bears from a safe distance.



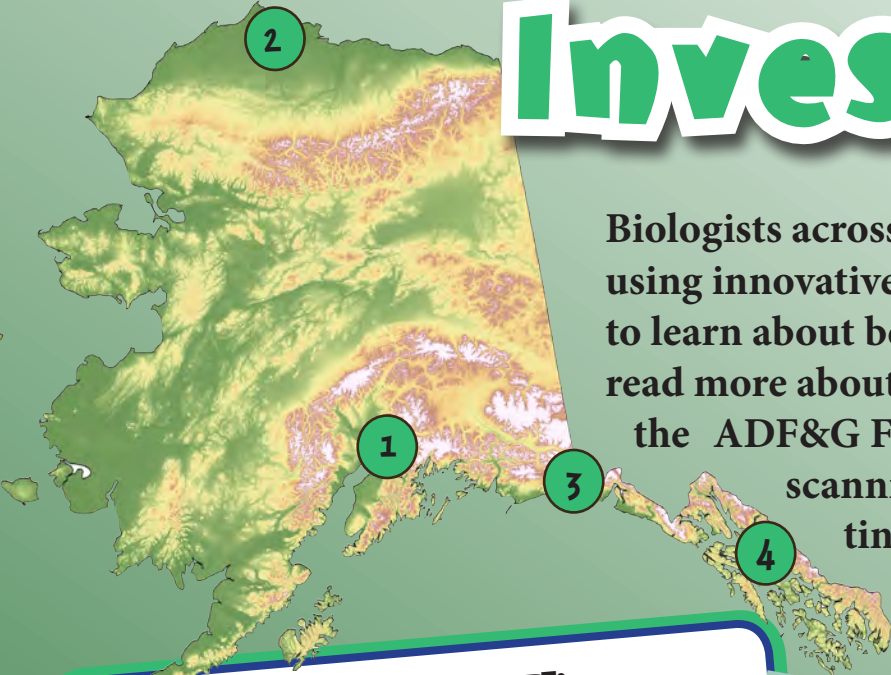
Keeping bears away from human food is perhaps the most important thing we can do to prevent conflicts and encounters between bears and people.

Fast Facts for the Field

- Make noise, talk or sing loudly so you don't surprise a bear.
- Hike in a group; groups are easier for bears to detect.
- Stay alert and look for signs of bears.
- Never approach or crowd bears; respect their "personal space."
- Keep food, garbage and other attractants out of reach of bears.
- Stay calm during a bear encounter, talk and wave your arms. Don't run!

Investigating Bears

Biologists across Alaska are using innovative techniques to learn about bears. You can read more about these exciting projects in the ADF&G Fish and Wildlife News by scanning the QR code or visit tinyurl.com/adfg-wildlife-news



1. A Bear's Eye View

It's no secret that black bears and brown bears live and thrive in Anchorage, Alaska's largest city. But where do they go and what do they do? Find out by scanning the QR code with a smart phone or visit tinyurl.com/adfg-storymap.



3. Traveling Bears

Have you ever wondered how far a bear travels during the summer, and where it dens in the winter? Read more at the ADF&G Fish and Wildlife news under October 2014: Malaspina Bears.

2. The Nose Knows!

Karelian bear dogs are being used to sniff out grizzly and polar bear dens in northern Alaska. The trained scent dogs use their keen sense of smell to detect faint bear smells coming from the dens. Read more at the ADF&G Fish and Wildlife news under May 2015: Detecting Grizzly and Polar Bear Dens: on Alaska's North Slope.

4. Nests or Dens?

When you think bear den, you probably don't picture a nest. Black bear researchers on Prince of Wales Island discovered that bears can be nesters! Read more at the ADF&G Fish and Wildlife news under March 2015: Nesting Bears: Bear Dens on Prince of Wales Island.

Be a Bear Observer

Share your own bear observations, something you heard from a friend, or use your imagination

Where: _____

Write out your story! _____

Activity: _____

Type of Bear: _____

Time of Day: _____

Season: _____



Anchorage black bear wearing a GPS collar with attached video camera.

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