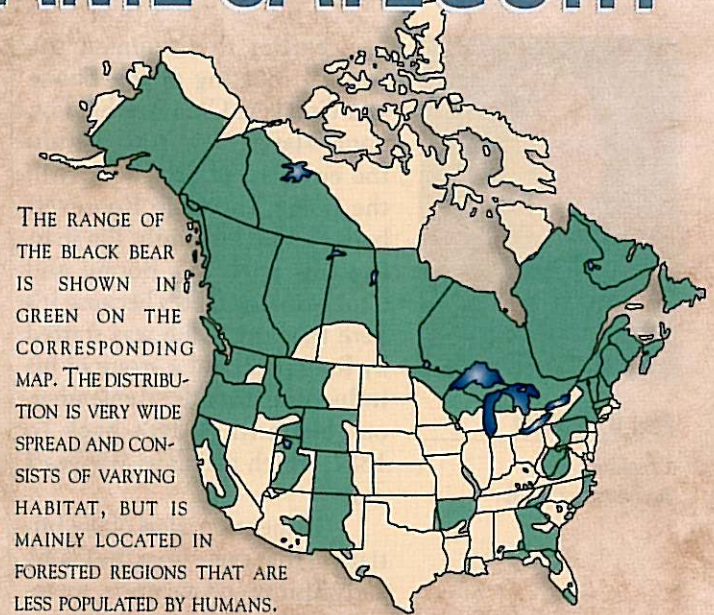


SPOTLIGHT BIG GAME CATEGORY



BLACK BEAR

Ursus americanus

By the time a black bear reaches four years in age it is generally considered full grown, but the skulls of the male bears continue to grow for several more years. Black bears may live for 20 or more years.

Black bears gain weight, mostly fat, during the summer and fall in preparation for hibernation during the winter. Male black bears can weigh up to 150 pounds more in the fall than they do in the spring.

Large adult bears are typified by small ears that are rounded and a short muzzle (lower right photo). Another identifying factor between a large adult and a young male or female bear is the shape of their bodies. Mature bears have a notably larger belly that hangs down nearly reaching the ground between its legs. On the other hand a bear that appears skinny with longer legs and large ears is more often than not a young male or female.

Female black bears usually bear two young every two to three years. Occasionally a litter may be three to four cubs. These cubs stay with their mother from the winter they are born, through summer and den with her through the next winter before going out on their own.

As noted in the distribution map above, black bears populate an extremely large and diverse portion of North America. Black bears are easily adapt to various habitats including those that are populated with humans. Their range is generally described as inaccessible forested regions but varies throughout the continent. Black bears can be found in the high mountains of the Rockies that offer spruce

and fir forests with a plitude of berries and extremely cold winters, as well as the warm mountainous regions of the Southwest where bears live amongst the chaparral and pinyon and feed upon prickly pear cactus. Black bears also inhabit the eastern portion of the continent. This habitat varies from oak and hickory forests in the southern Appalachian Mountains to cypress and black gum along the coast.

Black bears have four basic color phases that are considered somewhat geographic. You are more likely to find the black color phase in the East and brown in the West. Along the Pacific coast and the Northwest you can find the unique white or blue phases.

Black bears are shy and curious creatures that feed primarily on vegetation. They climb trees regularly and easily. Occasionally black bears will consume animal matter, but only if an opportunity arises. They are the least predatory of all the bears found in North America. Although in some areas such as Idaho, black bears have been a major source of predation on elk calves. Black bears are opportunists and in the areas of Idaho where this predation occurs the spring green-up of the forest is such that bears seeking forage from the green-up are on the elk calving areas at about the same time as calves are being born. With calves being available in fairly large numbers the bears find "easy pickings" on the newborn calves. With some bears, preying on elk is a learned behavior, especially among large boars.

