

Grizzly Bear *Ursus arctos horribilis*

Classification

The grizzly bear is a North American subspecies of the brown bear.

Class: Mammalia

Order: Carnivora

Family: Ursidae

Genus: *Ursus*

Species: *arctos*

Subspecies: *horribilis*

Distribution

The grizzly bear is one of several subspecies of brown bear. Brown bears are found in parts of North America, Scandinavia to Eastern Europe, Syria to the Himalayas and the Pyrenees, Alps, and Carpathian mountains. Populations in Europe are very fragmented. In North America, the grizzly bear subspecies is prevalent in Alaska and northern Canada, and can extend into the North Western United States and along the Rocky Mountains.

Habitat

The grizzly bear inhabits dense forest, arctic tundra and sub-alpine mountain regions.

Physical Description

- Grizzly bears are six to nine feet (1.8-2.7 m) in length.
- Males weigh 300-850 pounds (135-383 kg); females weigh 200-450 pounds (90-203 kg).
- Bears stand three to four feet (0.9-1.1 m) at the shoulder.
- The color of their fur can vary from blond to black but they are usually brown with gray or "grizzled" tips.
- They have very large heads and large front paws with long, slightly curved claws for digging.
- They have a distinctive muscular shoulder hump and small rounded ears.

Diet

What Does It Eat?

In the wild: Grizzly bears are omnivores - 75% of their diet is plants. In addition to 200 different plants such as roots, grasses, sedges, fruits, berries and nuts, they eat salmon, other fish and rodents. They also kill or scavenge ungulates such as elk and moose.

At the zoo: Omnivore chow with fruits, vegetables and occasionally fish.

What Eats It?

Cubs are subject to predation by adult male grizzlies, bobcats, eagles, mountain lions and wolves.

Social Organization

Grizzly bears generally live and hunt alone except for mating pairs and mothers with cubs. However, they may congregate to take advantage of a plentiful salmon spawning season.

Life Cycle

Grizzly bears reach sexual maturity at four to seven years of age. Females may mate with several males during the breeding season in May and June. Implantation of the fertilized egg is delayed until October or November when the female enters a den. From January to March two to three cubs are born weighing less than a pound (448 g). They stay with their mother for two to three years before going out on their own. Cubs have a high mortality rate due to predators. Grizzlies can live up to 25 years in the wild and up to 47 years in captivity.

Adaptations

Pearly Whites!

Bears are the only large predators that regularly eat both meat and plants. For this reason, they have large canines and smaller incisors for catching and killing prey, as well as large molars (broad flat teeth in the back of the mouth) that are used for crushing and grinding plant food. They also have massive skulls and strong jaw muscles that enable them to eat a varied diet.

Digging Tools

Grizzly bears have sharp, curved claws up to five inches long on their front feet that are used for digging up food such as roots and invertebrates, catching fish, tearing apart rotten logs in search of food, or slicing into plant or animal matter. Their claws can come in handy when the bears dig their dens for winter hibernation. The claws can also be used as weapons in a fight.

Deep Sleep

Due to the scarcity of food during the cold winter months, grizzly bears hibernate to survive. For six months or longer, grizzly bears survive on stored fat reserves built up during the spring and summer. During hibernation, they slightly reduce their body temperature and significantly reduce their heartbeat and respiration rate. While hibernating, they do not eat, drink, urinate or defecate. Female bears even give birth during the hibernation period using stored fat to provide milk for the cubs as well as sustain the mother until spring.

A Nose for More than Food

Grizzlies have a large snouts and noses with a sharp sense of smell to help them sniff out food items. Bears also communicate by scent marking on trees and bushes, as well as with their urine and feces. Their extraordinary sense of smell provides bears with information about the world around them and helps compensate for their poor eyesight, and is even better than their hearing.

Conservation Connection

IUCN Status: Lower Risk Least Concern

Grizzly bears are threatened because of habitat destruction and direct persecution by humans. Confrontations with humans generally result in fatal consequences for the bear.

Fun Facts

- The word grizzly comes from the French word "*gris*" which means gray. The tips of the fur are lighter than the base giving the bear a "grizzled" appearance.
- Brown bears are found in Europe, Asia and North America - the largest range of any bear species.
- Grizzly bears can run up to 35 miles per hour for short distances.

