



American Black Bear

Ursus americanus

Description: Fur is uniformly black in color except for a tan muzzle and sometimes light markings on the chest. Occasionally variations in color can occur including a cinnamon, blue and blonde. It has small eyes, rounded ears, a long snout, a large body, a short tail, and shaggy hair. They are smaller than grizzly bears and have smaller claws that are more tightly curved, and longer, smoother, and more tapered ears. Weight averages between 150–300 pounds.



Geographic Range/Habitat: The American black bear is distributed throughout North America, from Canada to Mexico and in at least 40 states in the U.S. They historically occupied nearly all of the forested regions of North America but in the U.S. they are now restricted to the forested areas less densely occupied by humans. In Canada, black bears still inhabit most of their historic range except for the intensively farmed areas of the central plains. Black bears are extremely adaptable and show a great variation in habitat types, though they are primarily found in forested areas with thick ground vegetation and an abundance of fruits, nuts, and vegetation.



Behavior: Black bears tend to be solitary animals with the exception of mothers and cubs. The bears usually forage alone but will tolerate each other and forage in groups if there is an abundance of food in one area. Black bears can enter a state of torpor during colder winter months when food is scarce. During this time, their respiration and metabolic rates are lowered, but their body temperature only decreases by about 10 degrees. Black bears can be easily woken from this state, unlike animals that truly hibernate.



Diet: Plants, fruits, nuts, insects, honey, salmon, small mammals and carrion.

Zoo Diet: At the zoo, black bears are fed a dry commercial omnivore chow along with fresh fruits, vegetables, greens, and occasionally fish.

Status: American black bears are listed as a threatened subspecies in Louisiana, eastern Texas and southern Mississippi.