

the bear's winter sleep to be an example of hibernation. Many other scientists, however, do not consider bears to be true hibernators. They point out that a bear's body temperature, unlike that of other hibernating mammals, does not drop greatly during winter sleep. In addition, a bear awakens easily and may become fairly active on mild winter days. These scientists use such terms as "winter lethargy" or "incomplete hibernation" to describe the bear's sleep period. See **Hibernation**.

A bear prepares for its winter sleep by eating large amounts of food during late summer and storing fat within its body for energy. When food becomes scarce, the bear goes to its den. The den may be a cave or a brush pile, or a burrow that the bear has dug under the roots of a large tree. Some kinds of bears may build shelters of twigs or dig shallow holes in hillsides. Female polar bears find ice caves or dig dens in the snow.

Brown bears and black bears, both of which live in regions that have harsh winters, almost always have a period of winter sleep. Species found in areas with milder winters may enter dens for only brief periods. Tropical species, such as sun bears and sloth bears, do not have a winter sleep period. Although polar bears live in the Arctic, they normally remain active during the winter. These bears spend the winter wandering the polar ice near open water and preying on seals and other marine mammals that come ashore.

Cubs. Most bear cubs are born during the mother's winter sleep period. A female bear usually has two cubs at a time, but the number may vary from one to four. The cubs weigh only $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 pound (0.23 to 0.5 kilogram) at birth. Their eyes are closed, and they have no fur. The eyes open about a month after birth, and by that time the body is covered with thick, soft fur. The cubs stay in the den with their mother for about two months. In spring, they come out, frisky and playful. They grow rapidly and may weigh 40 pounds (18 kilograms) by autumn. Cubs stay with the mother for one or two years. She teaches them to hunt for food.

Food. Bears are meat-eating animals, but they also eat many other foods. They hunt mice, ground squirrels, and other small animals in fields and forests. They may wade into streams and catch fish with their front paws or strong jaws. Favorite foods of bears include ants, birds' eggs, and grubs (see **Grub**). Bears sometimes prey on livestock, especially lambs and young pigs. Their diet also may include acorns, berries, fruits, nuts, and the leaves and roots of plants. Bears are fond of honey and will rip apart beehives or the nests of wild bees to get it. Their long, thick fur helps protect them from bee stings.

Habits. Bears often wander far in search of food. A grizzly bear may claim an area of 10 to 12 square miles (26 to 31 square kilometers) as its private hunting ground. Polar bears swim well and are often found living on islands of ice drifting more than 200 miles (320 kilometers) from land.

Bears are usually peaceful animals. They try to avoid a fight and run from danger. They have few enemies except other bears and humans. Bears show no fear of people and often wander into camping areas looking for food. However, all bears are short-tempered and get angry quickly. They are fierce fighters and will attack anything that seems to threaten them or their cubs, food, or homes. An angry bear moves quickly in spite of

its great size. One blow from its powerful front paws can kill even large animals, such as cattle and deer. The long, thick claws are also dangerous weapons. Few bears lose a fight with another kind of animal.

Wild bears live from 15 to more than 30 years. In 2005, a brown bear has lived as long as 47 years, and a polar bear for 34 years.

Kinds of bears

Zoologists traditionally recognize seven species of bears: (1) brown bears, (2) American black bears, (3) Asiatic black bears, (4) polar bears, (5) sun bears, (6) sloth bears, and (7) spectacled bears. In addition, some zoologists classify pandas as bears. But other zoologists place pandas in the raccoon family or in a family of their own. For information about pandas, see **Panda**.

Brown bears include the world's largest bears. Among them are the brown bears of Europe and Asia; Alaskan brown bears, such as the Kodiak bear and peninsula brown bear; and the grizzly bears of western North America. Brown bears vary in color from yellowish to almost black.

The brown bear of Europe and Asia appears as a character in many children's stories, where it is often named "Bruin," an old Dutch word meaning *brown*. These bears were used for hundreds of years in London for a cruel sport called *bearbaiting*. The bear was fastened to a stake and had to defend itself against vicious dogs. Cowboys in early California staged similar fights between grizzly bears and bulls. See **Bearbaiting**.

Alaskan brown bears are found chiefly on the mainland of Alaska and on Kodiak and Afognak islands off the southeastern coast of Alaska. They also live on other Alaskan islands.

Grizzly bears may grow up to 8 feet (2.4 meters) long, and they generally weigh from 250 to 600 pounds (110 to 270 kilograms). They get angry quickly, but usually do not attack unless they are threatened.

Grizzlies get their name from the white hairs that grow in their brown coats, making them look *grizzled* (streaked with gray). Grizzlies may also be called *silver-tips*. A grizzly has long, curved claws that it uses chiefly to dig out ground squirrels and mice to eat. The claws are also used as weapons.

Grizzlies live mainly in Alaska and western Canada. They also are found in the mountains of Idaho, Montana, Washington, and Wyoming. About 200 grizzlies live in Yellowstone National Park. See **Grizzly bear**.

American black bears are among the most common species. They grow about 5 feet (1.5 meters) long and are the smallest bears of North America. Most black bears are from 200 to 300 pounds (91 to 140 kilograms), but some weigh up to 500 pounds (230 kilograms).

Not all black bears are completely black. Some have black coats with brown noses and white patches on the chest. Others, called *cinnamon bears*, have a rusty brown coat. The *island white bear*, or *Kermode's bear*, has creamy white fur and white claws. It lives in the coastal areas of British Columbia. The *blue bear*, also called the *glacier bear*, has gray hairs mixed with the black ones, giving the animal a bluish color. The blue bear lives in the mountains of the St. Elias Range in southeastern Alaska.

Black bears can run as fast as 25 miles (40 kilometers)

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per hour when they chase prey, and they are skillful tree-climbers. These bears become troublesome around camps and cabins if food is left in their reach. Black bears have severely injured and sometimes have even killed campers or travelers who feed them.

Black bears live in many large wooded areas of North America. There are about 75,000 of them in the national forests of the United States. Many states allow people to hunt these bears, and hunters kill about 25,000 a year.

Asiatic black bears, sometimes called *Himalayan bears*, are smaller than American black bears. They grow about 5 feet (1.5 meters) long and weigh about 250 pounds (113 kilograms). Most Asiatic black bears are black, with some white hairs on the chin and a large white crescent-shaped mark on the chest. They are often called *moon bears* because of this mark.

In winter, Asiatic black bears may sleep for only short periods. They make beds of twigs in the snow so they can sun themselves. In summer, they build nestlike beds of sticks in trees, where they sleep.

Asiatic black bears are fiercer than most other kinds of bears. They often kill cattle and ponies, and sometimes attack people. These bears live in forests and brush regions throughout southern and eastern Asia. The Chinese hunt them, and many believe that the meat and bones have special healing powers.

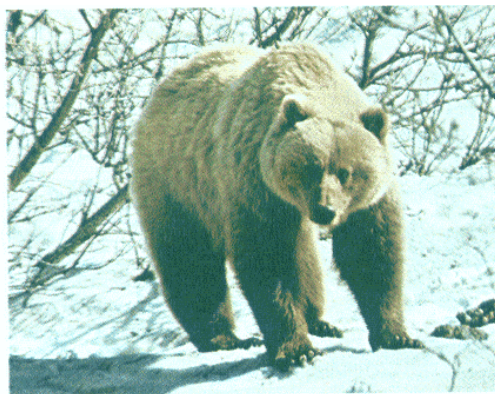
Polar bears are the best swimmers of all bears. They are only a little smaller than brown bears. They have a smaller head, but a longer, thinner neck than most other kinds of bears. The thick, heavy fur is creamy white, with a hint of yellow. A polar bear has pads of fur on the soles of its feet. The fur helps keep the feet warm and also helps the animal walk on ice.

Polar bears can move quickly in spite of their size. These bears can run up to 35 miles (56 kilometers) per hour—fast enough to catch reindeer. They can swim 3 to 6 miles (5 to 10 kilometers) per hour. Polar bears are excellent hunters, and when they are very hungry in winter, they may attack humans. Their usual prey consists mostly of sea animals, including fish, seals, and walrus. Polar bears also eat grass and dead whales that have been washed ashore. Traditionally, the Inuit (sometimes called Eskimos) hunted polar bears. They ate the meat, used the bones for many kinds of utensils, and made clothes from the hides. Some Inuit still hunt polar bears for these purposes.

Polar bears live in regions bordering the Arctic Ocean. Sometimes they ride floating chunks of ice as far as the Gulf of St. Lawrence, 750 miles (1,210 kilometers) south of the Arctic Circle. Many people have traveled to the Arctic to hunt polar bears for sport and for their hides. Such activities have greatly reduced the number of polar bears. See **Polar bear**.

Sun bears, sometimes called *Malayan bears*, are the smallest species of bears. They grow only about 3 feet (0.9 meter) long, and weigh 60 to 100 pounds (27 to 45 kilograms). Most sun bears have a black coat and a grayish or orange nose. Some have light brown feet. The bear gets its name from the white or yellow marks on its chest. Many people of ancient times believed the marks represented the rising sun.

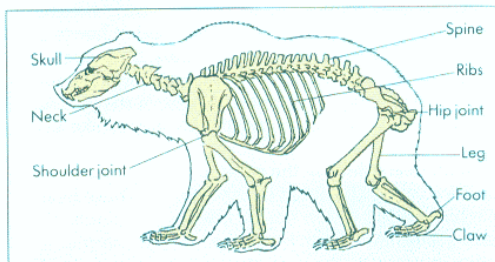
Sun bears have large paws with no hair on the soles. The claws are more curved and have sharper points than those of other kinds of bears. Sun bears usually



Leonard Lee Rue, APF

Grizzly bear

Skeleton of a grizzly bear



Grizzly bear tracks



WORLD BOOK illustration by Tom Dolan



Tom McHugh, Photo Researchers

Black bear