

# Bears

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# BEARS



Written by Kira Freed

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Front cover: Grizzly bear

Title page: Asiatic black bear

Back cover: Polar bear

Bears

Level S Leveled Book

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Written by Kira Freed

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### Do You Know?

The koala, often called a *koala bear*, is not a bear at all, even though it may look like one. It is a marsupial, or pouched mammal. Marsupials are especially common in Australia and also include the kangaroo, wombat, and Tasmanian devil. The only marsupial in the Americas is the opossum.



## What Is a Bear?

Bears are intelligent, curious, powerful animals that have always fascinated people. They have thick fur, short legs, small ears, stubby tails, long claws, and jaws that can crush bone. Bears have a keen sense of smell and can even smell and find food packed inside plastic bags. The smallest bear is the sun bear, which weighs 36 to 63 kilograms (80–140 lbs). The largest bear is the polar bear—male polar bears can weigh as much as 680 kilograms (1,500 lbs).

Many bears are known for **hibernating**, or sleeping, often for months at a time. Bears that hibernate do so to survive the cold winter when food is scarce. They consume large quantities of food during the warmer months to store enough fat to last without food during the winter.

Even though bears are famous for hibernating, many bears do not hibernate. Polar bears and giant pandas cannot obtain enough food during the warmer months to fatten up and go without food in the winter. Sun bears and sloth bears, which live where food is plentiful year-round, also do not hibernate.





Bear mothers are extremely attentive and caring.

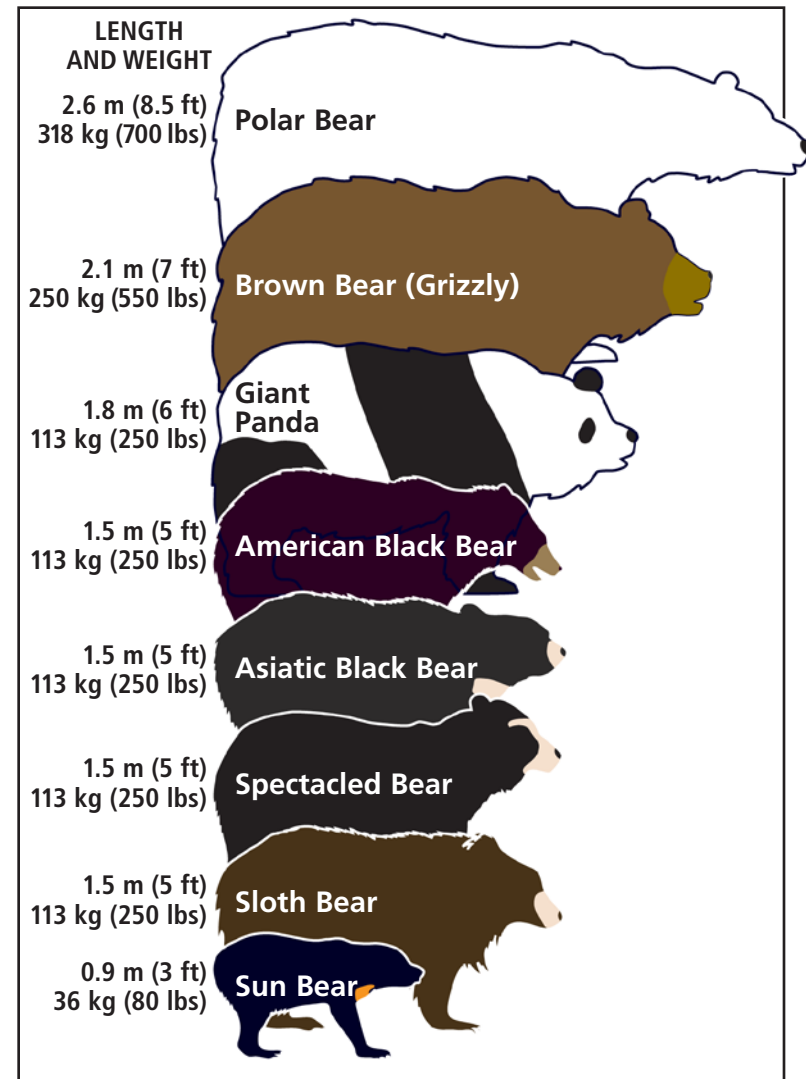
## Growing Up

Most adult bears are **solitary**, preferring to roam on their own. The exceptions are during the mating season and when mothers care for their cubs.

Bears usually have one to three cubs at a time. Bear cubs are very small, blind, and helpless at birth. They stay in a den with their mother for several months following their birth. Male bears do not help raise cubs, and in fact sometimes kill and eat them. The mother bear must fiercely protect her cubs while they are young and vulnerable. Cubs stay close to their mother for up to three years. During that time, their biggest task is to learn how to find food. Then they are on their own.

## Kinds of Bears

The following pages introduce the eight kinds of bears. Their **comparative** sizes are shown in the illustration below.



## Polar Bears

The polar bear is the largest bear and the largest land-dwelling **carnivore** on Earth. It is easily identified by its white or yellow-white fur that camouflages it in snowy surroundings. Polar bears are exceptional swimmers, aided by partially webbed front paws. A thick layer of fat keeps them warm, even in frigid water.

Polar bears live near the North Pole. They are powerful hunters, eating mostly seals and walrus. Because food can be scarce, they may not eat for four or five days at a time.



**THREATENED**

### Do You Know?

Polar bears have black skin under their fur. The black skin absorbs the sun's energy and helps keep the bears warm.



Polar bears live much of their lives on sea ice.

## Brown Bears

Not all brown bears are brown—they are divided into ten subgroups based on coloring, which ranges from light tan to reddish brown to very dark brown. One famous subgroup is the grizzly bear. Its name comes from its gray-tipped fur, which looks frosty, or grizzled. The largest brown bear, the Kodiak bear, lives in Alaska.

Brown bears have the largest range of any kind of bear. They live in western North America, parts of Europe, and much of northern Asia. Brown bears vary in size depending on where they live and what they eat. Fish, especially salmon, is a staple in the diet of many brown



Brown bears love salmon.

bears. The diet of a grizzly bear is among the most varied of any living animal. Grizzlies eat meat, fish, insects, eggs, berries, roots, leaves, and grass.



## Giant Pandas

As a symbol of conservation, the giant panda is one of the most well-known animals in the world. It is easy to recognize because of its thick black-and-white fur and distinctive eye patches.

Giant pandas live in the forest-covered mountains of China. They feed almost **exclusively** on bamboo and are completely dependent on the health of bamboo forests in order to stay alive. Giant pandas are extremely rare, with only about 1,000 left in the wild.

### Do You Know?

The giant panda has an extra "thumb" on each hand. It is not really a thumb, but instead a special wrist bone, covered with a pad, that helps the giant panda grasp bamboo stems.



No one is quite sure how pandas got their black-and-white fur.

**ENDANGERED**



## American Black Bears

The American black bear—often black but sometimes lighter—has a light-colored **muzzle**. Scientists recognize separate subgroups of American black bears based on coloring. These include the cinnamon bear (reddish brown), the Kermode bear (white), and the blue, silver, or glacier bear (bluish black or dark gray).

American black bears inhabit much of the North American continent, from Alaska and Canada to northern Mexico. Black bears are true **omnivores**, eating a wide variety of plants as well as honey, fish, insects, and dead animals. They are very good climbers.



American black bears are curious and intelligent.



## Asiatic Black Bears

The Asiatic black bear, sometimes called the *moon bear*, is black except for a light-colored muzzle and a light V-shaped patch of fur on its chest. Another unique feature is its unusually large ears.

Asiatic black bears live in mountainous regions of many Asian countries. They often anger farmers by eating crops and killing sheep, goats, and cattle. These bears have a **diverse** diet that also includes fruit, insects, and small animals.



The name *moon bear* comes from the patch of light fur, shaped like a crescent moon, on the bear's chest.

## Spectacled Bears

Spectacled bears have brown or black shaggy coats and light markings on their faces that sometimes look like eyeglasses, or spectacles. They are the only native bear in South America, living in forested mountains, grasslands, and coastal deserts. Like most bears, they are omnivores and will eat almost anything, including dead meat. They are particularly fond of fruit, sugarcane, and corn. Spectacled bears often climb cacti to eat the fruit at the top.



Spectacled bears have very good eyesight—almost as if their "spectacles" were real!

## Sloth Bears

The sloth bear is a type of small bear with a long, shaggy coat and a lighter-colored face. It moves slowly and often hangs from tree branches, similarly to another mammal called a tree sloth.

Sloth bears live in the forests and grasslands of India and the neighboring island of Sri Lanka. Their favorite food is termites. A sloth bear has a long snout that it uses to suck out these insects from their nests. These bears also eat fruit, berries, and honey. When feeding, they make a loud sucking noise that can be heard from far away.



Sloth bears can close their nostrils to better suck up termites.

## Sun Bears

The sun bear is the smallest member of the bear family. Mostly black, it gets its name from the light-colored patch of fur on its chest that is shaped like a rising sun.

Sun bears live in lowland tropical rainforests in Southeast Asia. They feed on both plants and animals. They have unusually long tongues to help them remove insects from hard-to-reach places. Sun bears are sometimes called honey bears because of their fondness for honey. Sun bears like honey so much that they will brave angry bees to get it—and eat the bees, too!



Sun bears are excellent climbers.



## Bear Survival

Stories about bears attacking people are frightening, but bears are in greater danger from people than people are from bears. Because of human activity, bear populations are shrinking. Over half of all bear habitats worldwide have been destroyed by humans for farming, mining, and forestry. Five kinds of bears are endangered, and the other three are decreasing in numbers.

Another threat to bears is hunters, who kill bears for meat, sport, or the use of body parts for medicinal purposes. Other people hunt bears because they consider them to be pests that threaten crops or livestock.

Conservationists and wildlife biologists are working to save bears from extinction. Many people are trying to protect bear habitats and stop hunting so that bears can continue to survive in the wild.

Scientists put a tag on this brown bear's ear to track it and learn about its behavior.



## Glossary

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>carnivore</b> ( <i>n.</i> )     | animal that eats meat (p. 7)   |
| <b>comparative</b> ( <i>adj.</i> ) | using or showing a comparison (p. 6)                                       |
| <b>diverse</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )     | made up of many things (p. 11)   |
| <b>exclusively</b> ( <i>adv.</i> ) | completely; entirely (p. 9)  |
| <b>hibernating</b> ( <i>v.</i> )   | sleeping deeply, especially for an entire winter (p. 4)                    |
| <b>muzzle</b> ( <i>n.</i> )        | the long part of an animal's head that includes its mouth and nose (p. 10) |
| <b>omnivores</b> ( <i>n.</i> )     | animals that eat both plants and animals (p. 10)                           |
| <b>solitary</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )    | alone; without companions (p. 5)   |

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