

Let's Learn About Bears

Bears are very popular animals in the United States. In fact, many children still sleep with stuffed teddy bears. Some adults still even collect stuffed teddy bears. *Did you know that teddy bears were named after Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt, the 26th US President?* In movies, TV, and books, bears are often shown to be friendly, gentle and cuddly. *Would a bear make a good pet? Do bears really eat honey?* Let's find out!

In this worksheet, you will learn more about the different types of bears that appear in the wild. You will learn about the habitat, diet, and some other interesting facts about bears.

All About Bears

Bears are *mammals*, which means they are warm-blooded, covered in fur, and give birth to live young. They can birth to up to 6 cubs, but the average is 3. In cold climates, the mother gives birth and nurses her young while in **torpor** (deep sleep), as they are not true hibernators. Torpor is *similar* to hibernation, because they sleep for a long time and do not eat, but - even though the bear's heart rate drops, their body temperature stays higher while sleeping. *In true hibernation, the body temperature would drop to the same temperature as the environment.* If it is a mild winter, or in warm climates, bears may remain active all year. Bear cubs are born in January or February, and can weigh less than a pound. It takes 5 to 7 weeks for the cubs to open their eyes. By the time they leave their den in April, bear cubs weigh 4 to 10 pounds. Bears live in North America, South America, Asia, and Europe. Bears are extremely intelligent, in fact, some people believe them to be smarter than dogs! Bears can live up to 25 years. There are 8 species of bears in the world, but only 3 of them are found in the United States and Canada, including the black bear, brown bear, and the polar bear. The black bear is the only species found in Connecticut.

A photo of a black bear taken in Connecticut. Image credit :Silfox/iStock/Getty Images Plus/Getty



Habitat, Diet and Social Habits

Black bears are native to Connecticut, but in the mid 1800's, there were no bears left in Connecticut because of hunters. Bear populations are on the rise again in Connecticut. Bears are being seen more and more often in towns and cities. Bears can be found in forests, deserts, mountains, grasslands, swamps, wetlands, and the tundra. Bears live in dens that they dig for themselves, or they can live in hollowed trees, under rocks, under a brush pile, in a cave, or inside rocky ledges. Bears may also take over a den that was built by another bear and abandoned. Bears are solitary creatures, with the exception of mating and raising their young cubs. A female black bear (sow) will range (travel) up to 5 to 7 square miles, while a male black bear (boar) has a home range of 12 to 60 miles. This is considered their territory. Bears are wild animals, and it is illegal to have them as a pet, because they can be very dangerous. Think about the claws! They also would not make a good pet because they need a *lot* of space! Although it is known to be true of grizzly bears, black bears are not known for attacking people that get between them and their cubs. That is a common myth. If you happened to encounter a black bear and her cubs, it is much more likely that a sow will climb up a tree or find another place to hide. *This does not mean you should approach a black bear! Never, ever, approach a bear!* Bears mark their territory by clawing trees and biting them with their teeth, and these are called bear marks. Grizzly bears and polar bears are considered to be the most aggressive and dangerous of bears.



Bears are **omnivores**, which means they eat both meat and plants. Bears are also opportunistic eaters, which means they will eat whatever is available. Their diet is still mostly plant based. Their diet might include leaves, twigs, herbs, grasses, roots, berries, insects, fruits and nuts. They may hunt other mammals, even deer and livestock. Bears are known for raiding bird feeders and eating birdseed in the spring, and raiding garbage cans in the fall.

Bear raiding a garbage can in Connecticut. Photo credit: The Hartford Courant.



What should you do if you encounter a bear? How can you keep bears out of your garbage? The link below from the State of Connecticut website will give you some tips, and tell you what to do if you happen to encounter a black bear while hiking, or even in your own yard.

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/wildlife/pdf_files/outreach/BearAwarePosterSmallpdf.pdf?la=en

Is it true that bears eat honey? *Yes, it's true! Bears are actually attracted to honey* and do eat it, but they also eat the bees and the larvae inside! Some bears also eat other mammals, fish, and carrion, and sometimes even human foods and garbage. Panda bears are known for eating bamboo leaves and stalks, but they aren't true herbivores because they will sometimes hunt small rodents. Grizzly bears are known for eating meat, but their diet is actually about 75% plant materials and herbs.

Physical Characteristics

Bears are large, have shaggy hair, stocky legs, small rounded ears, small eyes, long snouts, and a short, stumpy tail. They walk on four legs (but can stand on two), have 5 toes on each paw with sharp claws, and can weigh between 150-1500 pounds. Bear claws can be 1 - 5 inches long (depending on the type of bear) and do not retract like a cat's claws. Some bears are only 2 feet tall, but some can be up to 11 feet tall! Bears can run up to 35 miles per hour (compared to the human maximum of 28 miles per hour). They are very strong, can climb trees, are good swimmers, and have keen senses of smell and hearing.

Bears: Quiz

1. What type of animal is a bear?
 - a. Reptile
 - b. Bird
 - c. Mammal

2. What kind of bear is found in Connecticut?
 - a. Brown bear
 - b. Black bear
 - c. Grizzly bear

3. What does torpor mean?
 - a. Hibernate
 - b. Deep sleep
 - c. Tired

4. What is an omnivore?
 - a. Meat and Plant eater
 - b. Meat eater
 - c. Plant eater

5. What special characteristic does a bear have?
 - a. Good vision
 - b. Large claws that don't retract
 - c. Long tail

6. Why do bears mark trees with their claws?
 - a. To knock down the tree
 - b. To help them find a mate
 - c. To mark their territory

(See next page for answers)

Answers: 1.c, 2. b, 3. b, 4.a, 5.b, 6. c