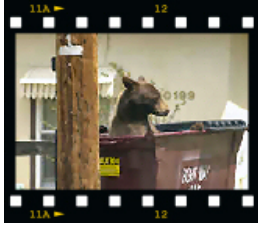


## Living with Wildlife in Bear Country (2 of 3)

### Black Bears at a Glance

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Black bears are the most common and generally the smallest of North American bears. Others include the grizzly/brown and the polar bear. Today, only the black bear is known to exist in Colorado. Although we do not know exactly how many black bears live in Colorado, population estimates range from 8,000 to 12,000 bears. A black bear may live 20 years in the wild, although very few do, and up to 25-30 years in captivity. Black bears are very agile, can run in bursts up to 35 mph and can run up or down hills quickly and easily. Their short, curved claws help them to climb trees. Black bears are strong swimmers.



Threats to black bears include accidents, disease, motor vehicles and starvation. Natural enemies include other bears and mountain lions. Humans are responsible for the deaths of most black bears: loss of habitat, feeding, illegal killing, destruction of bears that pose a threat to people or livestock and property. Prior to 1935, there was unlimited hunting of black bears. The designation of bears as game animals in 1935 provided for their management and protection.

Current hunting regulations protect cubs, and females with cubs, and prohibit the use of dogs and baiting.

### Physical Appearance

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*Ursus americanus*, meaning "American black bear", is the bear's scientific name. Despite the common name, black bear, they aren't always black. They may be honey-colored, blond, brown or black. They may have a tan muzzle or a white spot on their chest. Most Colorado black bears are some shade of brown, and they sometimes appear cinnamon-colored, leading some people to mistake them for grizzly bears.

A black bear's body appears heavy and is supported by short, powerful legs. The highest point of a black bear is the lower-middle of its back. There is no prominent shoulder hump as there is on the larger grizzly bear.

Black bears vary in size and weight, with males generally being larger than females. Adult males average 275 pounds while the adult female may average 175 pounds. Depending on the season, food supply and gender, they may weigh anywhere from 125 to 450 pounds. Black bears measure about 3 feet high when on all 4 feet or about 5 feet tall standing upright.



### Signs and Sounds

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Black bear tracks are very distinctive—the hind footprint resembles that of a human. All bears have 5 toes, with the front foot short and about 4-5 inches wide. The hind foot is long and narrow, measuring about 7 inches. Claw marks may or may not be visible.

Bears use trails just as people do since it's easier to travel on a trail than through underbrush. Being aware of tracks, droppings and other bear signs (claw marks on trees, rotten logs ripped apart and hair on tree bark from rubbing), will allow you to determine better the presence of bears.

It's easy to recognize a black bear's sizable droppings of plant leaves, partly digested berries, seeds or animal hair. Black bears are solitary. They don't associate with other bears except sows with cubs or during breeding. Bears may gather at a place with abundant food – for feeding.

Bears are intelligent and curious. They can see colors, form and movement. Although their vision is good, they generally rely on their acute senses of smell and hearing to locate food and warn them of danger.

Adult black bears make a variety of sounds. However, the most commonly heard sounds are woofing and jaw-popping. The young ones whimper or bawl.

To hear some bear sounds and view a short bear video, go to the [Kid's Discovery Pages](#).

## Habitat

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Black bears have long been viewed as forest dwelling animals. However, an unbroken expanse of forest doesn't provide enough food for black bears. They need berry patches and stream bottoms to satisfy their appetites for plants and insects.

In Colorado, the largest black bear populations are found in areas dominated by Gambel's oak and aspen near open areas of chokecherry and serviceberry bushes.

Every bear has a home range where it finds all it needs. It travels to different areas of its home range as snow recedes, plants sprout and berries ripen.

In general, black bears may range from 10 to 250 square miles. Adult males occupy the largest areas, while females usually establish their home range close to their mothers'.