

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

### Hunting and Feeding Habits

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Bears may be active anytime, day or night, most often during morning and evening twilight. When not feeding or looking for food, they rest in day beds – next to a log in a windfall, in dense brush or in a depression.

Black bears are omnivores—they eat both plants and animals. About 90 percent of a bear's diet is made up of nutritious plants, while about 10 percent of its diet consists of animals.

Bears will eat broad-leafed flowering plants, berries, nuts, insects, carrion (dead animal carcasses) and grasses.

In late summer, black bears are trying to fatten up for winter hibernation. During this period, they may be actively feeding for up to 20 hours per day and may ingest 20,000 calories daily.



### Bears and Winter

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Since little food is available during winter, bears would have difficulty surviving if they remained active, so they hibernate. In Colorado, female bears enter their dens in late October and males in early November.

Black bears commonly den in rock caverns, excavated holes beneath shrubs or trees, in hollow logs or rotten trees and in brush thickets. Rock caverns are the most common kind of den in western Colorado.

A hibernating bear's heart rate and breathing slow, and its body temperature drops 4-12° F. During this time, bears do not eat, drink or eliminate body wastes. They maintain their energy levels and water balance by using stored fat. When bears leave the den, snow may still be on the ground, but green-up has usually begun at lower elevations.

Many bears will move to lower areas in spring. Also, it's a couple weeks before the bear's digestive system becomes active. During this critical period, the bear must rely on the remaining stored fat.

### Mating and Breeding

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In Colorado, male bears are capable of breeding at three years of age. A few female bears may have cubs at three or four years, although five years is more common.

Bears mate in early summer, but development of the fertilized egg is delayed until November. If the female enters the den in poor condition, it is believed she will reabsorb the fertilized egg rather than continue development of a fetus.

The female bear generally does not breed again while her cubs are with her.

## Birth to Maturity

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After a two to three month gestation period, one to three (usually two) tiny cubs are born in midwinter. They are blind, toothless and covered with very fine hair at birth.

Nurtured with their mother's rich milk, they grow from less than one pound at birth to an average of 10-20 pounds by the time they all emerge from the den in mid-May.

Care of the cubs rests solely with the female. The cubs watch their mother and learn by mimicking her. Most black bear cubs stay with their mother for one year. The young may climb trees for protection or when they are threatened.

By the time the black bear cubs' second spring arrives, they have become more self-reliant. Littermates may stay together through the summer and perhaps even den together. Cubs will usually not reunite with their mother. Some cubs separate from their mother in their first autumn and become independent.

## To Learn More about Black Bears

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For the most part, people and wildlife can coexist. Living with wildlife is an enjoyable part of being a resident of Colorado. The key to coexisting is to respect wildlife and its habitat.

Learn more about black bears:

***Bears—Their Biology and Management***, 1999, Proceedings from the International Conference on Bear Research and Management (also 1970, 1974, 1977, 1980, 1983, 1986, 1989).

***Black Bear: The Spirit of the Wilderness***, 1981, by Barbara Ford, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, MA.

***Black Bears of West-Central Colorado***, 1991, by Tom Beck, Colorado Division of Wildlife, Technical Publication #39.

***Bear Attacks: Their Causes and Avoidance***, 1985, by Stephen Herrero, Nick Lyons Books/Winchester Press, New York, NY.

***The Wonder Series: The Everywhere Bear***, A Story and Activities by Sandra Chisholm Robinson, Denver Museum of Natural History, CO.