

BEARS FIRST

Idaho Black Bear Rehab Update

March 20, 1997

Will You Help These Orphaned Cubs

About the Idaho Black Bear Rehab Program



In 1989, Sally Maughan, wildlife rehabilitator of 10 years, started the Idaho Black Bear Rehabilitation Program. She began studying black bear cubs under the guidance of wildlife biologist John Beecham. He is considered one of the foremost black bear experts in the country. During 20 years of bear studies in Idaho, he raised and released many cubs. With his encouragement and support, she spent the next five years studying the cubs in rehab. For five years, three hours a day, March through November she studied their behavior and learned their habits. From this study came the rehab techniques used to prepare the cubs for release..

Idaho is one of the few states that releases orphaned cubs. Most states will not allow the release of orphaned cubs. Most zoos or wildlife parks will not take them. Fish and Game departments have few options when it comes to these cubs. They may be humanely killed or left to try and survive on their own. The chances of orphaned cubs surviving on their own is very slim.

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Between 1989 and December of 1996, we placed a total of 31 orphaned bear cubs in the rehab program. Four of these cubs died from injuries or illness. We released the rest back into their natural habitat. In 1994, Sally presented this program at the Western Bear Conference in Provo, Utah. Many wildlife managers, biologists, Fish and Game departments, and bear researchers have since requested copies of the program. Some states expressed an interest in using this program as a model to start their own program. Today, thanks to the many cubs released in Idaho, more states are considering rehas as an alternative to killing orphaned cubs.

How Do Cubs Become Orphaned?

Female bears are usually very good mothers. However, if disturbed or startled, especially first time mothers, they may abandon the cubs. Fires can separate the cub and mother. Hunting season, logging, poaching, and starvation may result in orphaned cubs. Whatever the reason, a cub cannot survive on it's own.

What Happens To Orphaned Cubs When They Enter The Program?

Cubs start arriving as early as March and may continue to arrive throughout the year. When the cubs come in, they take their first visit to the veterinarian. He checks their condition and removes any ticks. We keep the young cubs inside in vari-kennels until they are about 10-11 weeks old. We feed them a special formula of Multi-Milk and Espilac. The formula matches their mothers milk as much as possible. Feedings range from every three hours to twice a day until weaned at 5 months.

By the time they wean themselves off the formula, they are eating dry dog food, lots of fruit, some fish and meat. They also begin the process of weaning themselves from us. The cubs become more interested in each other and lose interest in their foster mother. Throughout the first five months, they play, wrestle, and discover what it means to be a bear. Between five and eight months, they start putting on weight, building strength, and maturing.

In November we start preparing them for hibernation. In nature, weather and lack of food causes the bears to become listless. They become less active with each day until finally they find a den and hibernate until spring. We duplicate that process by gradually cutting back the food supply. Three to four weeks before we plan to take them to the mountain dens, we stop feeding. They grump and groan for a few days and then enter the dens we supply in the enclosure. Usually, we have them in hibernation for a least two weeks before we move them to the mountain dens.

When the timing is right, we wake them up, load them in metal carriers, and take them to their new home in the mountains. We place the cubs in both real bear dens and artificial dens that we made. John Beecham and wildlife biologist Jeff Rohlman tranquilize the cubs at the den site. Once inside the dens, the front is covered with pine boughs and snow. The cubs remain asleep for several hours. We always hope they stay in the dens

when the tranquilizer wears off. However, the cubs sometimes leave the dens. They wander around their new home and find a new place to hibernate for the winter.

In April or May, depending on the weather, they come out of hibernation. Black bear cubs usually stay with their mother until June or July when they are a year and a half old. Orphaned cubs are on their own a couple of months earlier, but have more weight on them than other cubs in the wild. This extra weight helps them survive until food is plentiful.

What This Program means to Idaho and Cubs in Other States

For Idaho, it means our orphaned cubs have a place to go. We don't have to euthanize them or leave them in the field to die. For cubs in other states, it means they may get a second chance, where before they had no chance. It is so important for orphaned cubs everywhere to continue the program. There is still much to learn about the cubs during the first year of their life. Many biologist study bears, their behavior, their habits in the wild. They don't have the opportunity to observe and study cubs in depth as we do in this program. The success of this program in Idaho gives other states incentive to develop their own programs. It gives us a chance to learn even more about successfully raising and releasing orphaned bear cubs. Citizens of Idaho should be proud that our state, our Fish and Game officers, and our wildlife rehabilitators worked together to pioneer this program and save the lives of orphaned cubs.

Please Help Us Save hese Cubs

My name is Sally Maughan. For the past eight years, I've had the rare priveledge of spending my days with orphaned bear cubs. I devoted all my spare time, money, and energy to their care and to developing the Idaho Black Bear Rehab Program. Sometimes I had one or two, sometimes six, sometimes as many as thirteen cubs.

It costs approximately \$400 per cub to place them in the rehab program. My job not only had to support my own living expenses, but also the expense of feeding and caring for the bears. Last year, I struggled with the realization that I couldn't continue to be the sole supporter of the bear program. It was an agonizing decision for me, but in September I began making plans to shut the program down. It was then, my family, friends, and neighbors realized the situation was serious. They donated the money and food to help get the cubs through until we put them in hibernation for the winter. They convinced me that help would be there if I would let people know how to help these orphaned cubs and the program.

The good news is that it won't take a lot of money to save the program. The formula is vital to the growth and development of the cubs. It can cost up to \$150 week for enough formula to feed three cubs during their peak intake. That is an expense that there is no way to avoid. However, the other major expense is dog food and fruit. Sometimes the cubs go through 20-40 pounds of dog food a day and several cases of fruit each week. Everyone knows how expensive fruit is these days. Buying fruit is a really killer on the budget.

However, now I have many people who will donate fruit off their trees. What is needed, is three or four freezers in good working condition to store the fruit.

Equally important to the program, is finding one individual to oversee the collection of the fruit on a weekly basis. My days are often 20 hours long. As important and vital to the program as this task is, I just don't have any more hours in my day to give. Is there anyone reading this who can volunteer to take on this responsibility? It needs to be done on a weekly basis to insure the cubs have the food necessary to put on sufficient weight to survive hibernation.

Attached with this newsletter is a list of all the supplies the cubs need during their stay in the rehab program. **PLEASE CAN YOU HELP! TELL YOUR FRIENDS, TELL YOUR FAMILY. IT ONLY TAKES ONE PERSON TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE!**

I wouldn't ask others to help without making a renewed commitment myself. After a lot of soul searching, I decided to go for broke, literally! In December, my job moved to Salt Lake. I choose not to move with it. Instead, I took what money I had left and invested in office equipment so I could work at home. I don't know many jobs that would let you bring cubs to work with you and stop to feed every three hours. I felt the only way I could continue taking care of the cubs was to find a way to work at home. So if anyone knows of job opportunities working on the computer from home, please let me know.

I have also taken steps to incorporate the program. I've enlisted the help of six very good friends and caring individuals as board members. Once incorporated as Idaho Black Bear Rehab Inc., we will apply for non-profit status. Perhaps then we can get some funding from grants. However, it may be a year before we complete the process and can apply for a grant. Until then, I need to find a way to support this program.

To further show my commitment to this program, I have set up the Sally A. Maughan Trust. Everything I now own or will own is in this trust. On my death (probably from exhaustion) everything will go to Idaho Black Bear Rehab. Inc. I'm only saying this here because I think it is so important for you to know that I'm totally committed to this program and the cubs whose lives it can save. In todays economy and hectic lifestyle, it is difficult enough to care for your own, without someone asking you to give more. But, I am asking. Please, help if you can, in whatever ways you can. Maybe just a dollar, a sack of peaches, a sack of dog food, an old freezer. What you give can help us save another cub..

Now that you know what is needed, please carry these needs with you. Mention it to friends and family. If just one person has a freezer they want to donate, it brings us that much closer. With the freezers and a volunteer to coordinate picking up the fruit, we have it made. If I find a way to work at home, I can continue supporting the program. Together, if we can accomplish these goals this year, then the program will be saved and we won't have to worry about shutting it down in the future..

I've cared for many species of wildlife during my eighteen years as a licensed wildlife rehabilitator. Of all those animals, none is more knowing of who they are and what they are about, than the bear. I love and respect the spirit of this animal. Given a choice, I'll continue to devote my life to caring for orphaned cubs

and giving them a second chance. In future issues, I'll share with you some of the wonderful experiences these cubs have brought into my life.

