

# BEARS FIRST

Idaho Black Bear Rehab., Inc.

November, 1997



If I could just get over there before they nab me.....

## 1997 - A YEAR OF CHANGE

This year was one of challenges, growth, and new opportunities. It started a little shaky with plans to manage the day to day care of the cubs by working from home. For the first time since I started the bear program in 1989, I appealed to the community for help. The response was wonderful. The program received enough money to buy formula, donations of 2 freezers, dog houses, dog food, and offers of fruit.

We incorporated and started the paperwork to become non-profit. We attended the bear conference in May, learning of some exciting news using DNA to identify and track the movements of individual bears. We continued working with other states to rehabilitate and release orphaned cubs as an alternative to euthanizing them. We consulted with rehabilitators in other states and countries to help them with their orphaned cubs. Next year looks even more promising for growth and accomplishments. It is possible we will receive a grant for 1998 from an organization in London. More on that next time.

It was also an unusual year because no orphaned cubs arrived. Although we received calls, either we didn't find them or they were yearlings (cubs of the previous year). Fish & Game moved them to another area. As winter sets in, cubs not fat enough to start hibernation could still arrive. However, with the plentiful food supply this summer, we aren't expecting any. This year gave us a chance to focus more on helping other states and countries to understand the logistics of rehabilitating orphaned bear cubs. And, as often happens in life, few or no bears one year usually means an abundance of orphaned cubs next year.

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## DID YOU KNOW.....

The American Black Bear can be black, brown, blue-gray, blonde, or cinnamon. They can even be white, such as the rare Kermode bears (also called the spirit bears) of British Columbia.

Bears can distinguish color. They have an acute sense of hearing and an keen sense of smell. The average life expectancy is 15 years. Records exist of bears 30 years old. Adult males weigh 200-400 pounds with females weighing considerably less. Pennsylvania reported one male black bear weighing more than 800 pounds.

Breeding season begins in May and continues into June. Gestation is actually 200-220 days, but the fertilized egg does not start to grow until the female goes into hibernation. If the female does not have enough weight, her body could absorb the egg and no cubs will be born. With delayed implantation, cubs are born weighing only 10-20 ounces. If cubs grew from the start of gestation, they would be born

weighing 10 pounds or more. The amount of milk required would be more than the hibernating mother could provide.

Cubs are born late January or early February. Their eyes open at 4-5 weeks. When leaving the den in April or May, the new cubs weigh about 5 pounds. Cubs remain with their mother for the first year and a half of their life, returning to den with her the first winter. The following May, when she breeds again, she will send the cubs out on their own.

Bears go into hibernation slowly, taking several weeks to reach a dormant state. During hibernation, they can still be aroused quickly and are aware of what goes on around them. Females enter the dens before males, but males are the first to leave the dens. Bears may remain in the den as long as 6 months. Fat gained during the year provides the only source of liquid needed by the body. The bear does not eat or drink during hibernation. Several studies are trying to find out how the bears maintain strong bones during such long periods of inactivity. Learning the secret could help humans prevent osteoporosis.

Idaho has enough habitat to support a population of 20,000 bears.



Photo by Dave Sellers



Photo by Dave Sellers

## HOW IT ALL STARTED

I knew squat about bears. If there was a show on TV about bears, I turned the channel. If there was a book, I didn't buy it. If there was a magazine article, I didn't read it. I think fate decided one day it would bury me in bears. Until then it would keep me away from them. Then I would be fresh and last longer when the time came. That time came one day in 1989 when I got the phone call asking if I could take a bear.

To me, all bears were 1500 pounds, 8-10 feet tall, fangs several inches long, and claws longer than Dolly Parton nails. My vision of a bear was not one that encouraged a willingness to become up close and personal. When I got around to asking how much the bear weighed, they said 5 pounds. My vision quickly fizzled like a balloon with the air let out of it. Instead of an Alaskan Brown Bear, I found myself with the cutest, most adorable, living teddy bear you could imagine.

Fish & Game told me to call John Beecham when he returned to town in a few weeks. I didn't have a clue who he was except they said he knew something about bears. I soon came to understand just what an understatement **that** was.



**From this....**

Having no knowledge of bears, I immediately went to every book store and the library. I found little except the stories of someone here or there who raised a cub.

However, they weren't wildlife rehabilitators and they never released the cubs. I needed to know details about bears, their behavior, their habitat, their life. So, I frantically searched through the NWRA (National Wildlife Rehabilitators Assoc.) directory. It lists all the rehabilitators in the country and what animals they specialize in handling. There wasn't a single listing for bears. I didn't know there wasn't anyone rehabilitating bears. Nor would most states release orphaned cubs. Now I was really in trouble. No books, no one to talk to, nowhere to go for help until John returned.

**To this....**



I was more apprehensive than the cub when he arrived on my doorstep. He quickly won me over. All the cub wanted was a bottle and someone to hold him. He was every bit the living teddy bear. I thought to myself this wasn't bad at all. In fact, it was a lot of fun and pretty easy. That fantasy lasted about a week and half! Then my adorable teddy bear turned into a hurricane on four feet. When working with wildlife, you sometimes break a rule of nature you never knew existed. When that happens, you usually don't know it until the trouble starts. I assumed that was the reason for the change in behavior..

When John returned, he came out to see the cub and give me some advice. I still laugh as I think of that day. Not having any information to go on, I'd guessed the cub to be about eight weeks old. John took one look and said, "I can see why you're having trouble. The cub is more like four months old!" It didn't mean much to me at the time. Today, I can tell you it would be like treating a teenager as a two year old. You can just imagine the nightmares that would cause! When I expressed concern at the sudden change in behavior, John reminded me that I must be doing something right. The cub obviously felt safe and secure enough to become just what it was - a bear. So, with Ruggles as my teacher, I began my journey into the world of black bears.

**PLEASE, WILL YOU HELP? SHARE THIS UPDATE WITH YOUR FRIENDS, CO-WORKERS, RELATIVES AND ANYONE YOU FEEL CAN HELP . YOU MIGHT BE THE ONE PERSON TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE! IT COULD EASILY BE YOUR DONATION OR ACTION THAT SAVES ANOTHER CUB!**

## BEAR NECESSITIES - WISH LIST

**URGENT:**       **\$\$\$\$ for formula - 3-4 Reliable freezers - Volunteer coordinator - Canned and fresh fruit**

**GENERAL SUPPLIES:**

Clean grass hay for bedding - Bath towels - Hand towels - Dog houses for dens - Lumber for roof and building dens - Large, medium, & small Vari-Kennels - Large metal Army dog transport carriers - Postage stamps  
Donated printing  
**Pipes & plumbing supplies to bring water to enclosure**  
**Plumber to donate work and equipment to lay water pipes**

**SPECIALITY ITEMS - AVAILABLE BY SPECIAL ORDER FROM PET-AG**

Multi-Milk        Esbilac (powdered)        Vionate

**FORMULA ITEMS:**

Jars of Gerbers fruit baby cereal - Flavored Yogurt - Honey - Cans of condensed milk (not evaporated) - Natural applesauce - Boxes of oatmeal - Boxes of Gerbers baby rice cereal

**FOOD ITEMS:**

Sacks of dry dog food - Bread - Acorns & Hazelnuts  
Fish (salmon or trout) - Raw carrots - Leaf lettuce  
Cans or jars of jars of fruit

**Fresh fruit of all kinds: apples, peaches, pears, grapes, plums, cherries, apricots, watermelons, cantaloupes, blackberries, blueberries, boysenberries, strawberries**



Ruggles - 1989 - He started it all!

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**Idaho Black Bear Rehab., Inc.**  
**Attn: Sally Maughan**  
**6097 Arney Lane**  
**Boise, Idaho 83703**

