

# BEARS FIRST

Idaho Black Bear Rehab., Inc.

November, 1999



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

## 1998 - 1999 - TWO YEARS OF GROWTH & EXCITEMENT

The last newsletter we did was in Nov. 1997. Many exciting events happened the last two years and finally we are able to tell you all about them. Each of you through your encouragement, support, and donations helped make it all possible. Fasten your seat belt and Sally will tell you the great news for both the bear program and orphaned bears in general.

### OPEN LETTER FROM SALLY MAUGHAN

When I started as a wildlife rehabilitator 21 years ago, I worked with all wildlife. It wasn't long before I seemed to have acquired the nickname of "the squirrel lady". This past few years my status seems to change to that of "the bear lady". While I consider it a privilege to be called either one, I'm most proud of the accomplishments and changes the bear program has brought to the plight of orphaned cubs. The past two years brought new challenges and many wonderful changes.

I'm grateful for our continuing relationship with **WSPA (World Society for the Protection of Animals)** in London, England. WSPA's Liberty division is involved with bear projects all around the world. Several years ago, I began a correspondence with Victor Watkins at WSPA. They were building a sanctuary for the dancing bears of Turkey confiscated by authorities & hoped to release some of the younger bears. I was very impressed by their work and efforts to help bears around the world. During 1998, bear specialist Chris Morgan, currently

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Director of Insight Wildlife Management visited the bear program on behalf of WSPA. That year we received 8 bears. WSPA provided funding to feed and care for these bears. They also funded two projects - finishing the solid roof on the main enclosure and bringing water to all the enclosures. In 1999 they again provided funding for other projects. With the help of Idaho Dept. of Fish & Game, John Beecham and IBBR put together two education suitcases filled with educational information about bears. They are held at Fish & Game for loan to schools throughout Idaho. WSPA also provided some funding to track the cubs when they leave the dens in the spring. Another project scheduled for 1999 was to film a training video on the rehab process for other rehabilitators, Fish & Game Departments across the country, and for any bear projects working with orphaned cubs. However, we postponed that project until next year.

During the spring of this year the owners of the property next to us sold it for development. That means we will soon be surrounded on both sides by houses. I began looking for new property to relocate the bear program. Unfortunately, I didn't find any land that would work and in the right price range. After much consideration, I decided to stay here and try to make it work. One of my main reasons for staying was the support and encouragement of The City of Garden City. They have been wonderful to work with. I can't imagine finding a better place in which to locate the bear program than we have now.

Having made that decision, WSPA offered to build a new and larger enclosure which would allow us to take more orphaned cubs & separate falls arrivals if necessary. I've never said no to an orphaned cub, but as more states asked for help in rehab, I knew the time would come. Today, as I'm writing this, our new enclosure in the pasture behind me is almost done. Good news since we just received word that yet another state would like the bear program to rehab cubs for them. We will have pictures and information on our celebration of the new enclosure this spring. I hope those of you in the area will be able to visit. It will be a chance to see first hand that it is possible to do a lot with just a little. Although we aren't a big rehab center, we've still been able to effect big changes to help bears.

My personal thanks and gratitude to WSPA for their support and help the past two years. They do tremendous work for not only domestic animals, but animals in situations most of us aren't conscious of in our daily lives - for example, animals left homeless and starved in countries ravaged by war. If you are especially interested in helping bears, contact WSPA and ask about Libearty projects. Their address is at the end of the newsletter. I encourage anyone interested in helping animals to find out more about WSPA. They are doing wonderful work to help both domestic animals and wildlife.

My personal thanks to each of you who stood with us even when no news was coming your direction. It's been a very busy two years and we are just now catching our breath. I hope you will continue to support the work we are doing to save orphaned cubs. I wish everyone a Merry Christmas & the best of New Years.

### **1998 BEARS - A NEW EXPERIENCE - A SAD EVENT**

During 1998 we handled eleven orphaned cubs from Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. It was a year of learning and new experiences. Two of the cubs arrived in June. Nine more arrived in October after being orphaned during the late summer or early fall. One male, hit by a car several weeks earlier faced serious problems. He had a broken hind leg which was healing. He also appeared to be blind, most likely from head injuries when hit by the car. We named him Akane - Hawaiian for mountain - because he had climbed some major mountains to survive as long as he did on his own. And, because he had more mountains yet to climb. We worked with him through the winter hoping for a miracle. Sadly, in the spring we had to euthanize him. Bears seem so invincible, it's always difficult to face such a situation.

In November, we began preparing the two June arrivals for hibernation and transport back to Oregon. They were both healthy and ready for their long sleep. In fact, they started hibernation early, just a few days before the other nine bears arrived. When they appeared on the scene the two Oregon cubs decided it wasn't time to sleep after all. They came out of their chosen dens and greeted the new bears. After a few days of gingerly stepping around each other, the playing and games began.

Since nine of the cubs were underweight and not ready for hibernation, we divided the enclosure with a temporary chain link panel. By doing so, we could continue feeding the nine cubs, and send the two Oregon cubs back into hibernation. What seemed like a good idea to us, was the last thing the bears had in mind. It took them less than half a day to dig under the divider and join their buddies. Although they never fully started hibernation again, they did become lethargic and remained in the dens most of the time. In December, John Beecham & Sally Maughan drove them to Oregon to meet with wildlife biologist Tara Wertz. Tara had a huge hollow log ready for them to den in. Everything went perfectly and as far as we know today, the two cubs are still out there.

The other nine remained and we continued to feed them to build up enough weight for hibernation. Just when we were about there, a nasty little mite made it's presence known for the first time. Bald spots began to appear on the rumps and stomachs of the bears. We'd never seen that before, other than the usual scratching during the hot summer months which sometimes rubbed off a bit of hair. It moved quickly and spread across their entire bodies. Have you ever seen a bald bear....or worse yet, several of them. It isn't a pretty picture, comical as they may appear to be. After some research, Charlie Robbins at the University of Moscow came up with the answer. They found a mite on some of their bears years earlier that seemed to bother cubs of the year during the late fall just before hibernation. Those that didn't hibernate were especially susceptible to fur loss since the mite caused them to scratch & rub far more than bears deep in hibernation. We began medication and slowly they regained the undercoat.

By the time everyone had their coats back, we faced scheduling problems with the release team. Once we resolved that, we found ourselves in the middle of hunting season. That meant waiting even longer to release and instead of a winter denning, we ended up with a spring release. It may sound like a better time to release, but denning the bears offers them a time to adjust to their new world & not run into people should they come out of the dens. Spring release offers little time for the bears to adjust and opens the door for bears & people to run into each other.

As for other news, I'm still struggling to get the non-profit paperwork completed. Don't give up on us - it's very involved and complicated - not something you want to do when you only have an hour or two. Believe me, you'll hear the sounds of celebration across the country when this major feat is accomplished.

During 1999, we had a lot of national and international publicity. It was very exciting to bring the plight of orphaned bears to the world. To name just a few - King TV in Seattle, New York Times, NBC News with Tom Brokaw, Incredible Idaho, Sunset Magazine, Good Morning America, London Daily Mail, and various radio stations. We've had requests from Italian and German TV, Discovery News, and many others.



## 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 a 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.



Photos by Dave Sellers

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 an estimated population of 20,000 bears.



## 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.

## 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 - Large, medium, & small Vari-Kennels - Large metal Army dog transport carriers - Postage stamps - Donated printing

### 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!

**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!**

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