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FALL 2010

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Bear Rehab**



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IDAHO BLACK BEAR REHAB

Lysa Beltz



Hidden out State Street in Garden City is the Idaho Black Bear Rehabilitation Center (IBBR). This is one of very few that focuses on caring for and preparing black bear cubs to survive in the wilderness and live a normal life. For years it was thought that bears could not be around humans and return to the wild without becoming 'problem' bears. However, the success rate of the IBBR is showing that there is a different option. From over 200 bears only five have been recorded as 'problem' bears which means they caused issues with humans within five to six months of their release. All IBBR bears are ear-tagged and many have radio collars so they can be followed for a few months after release.

For the last 20

years, Sally Maughan has cared for black bear cubs, up to 21 hours a day, seven days a week. When the current facility was opened in Garden City it was 'in the country'. Today it is practically surrounded by housing and humanity but the bears and people co-exist quite nicely. There is an open lot next door that the facility would like to purchase but the cost of land has proven a challenge (see below for how to donate to help!) When asked, "What have you learned from the bears"? Maughan's answer is that each bear has its own individual personality. "They are smart, they are special and they teach you to get straight to the point. They are very accepting of who you are and very giving of who they are," said Maughan.



How many bears are housed at IBBR?

Currently there are five black bear cubs being cared for. The maximum number of cubs in one year was 53 in 2007 and the average is 10 - 15 cubs per year. When the younger cubs first arrive, they stay in a small five foot cage inside the house so they don't feel abandoned. After a few days, they move to a larger cage out on the deck so they can still hear people close by but start establishing their own identity. Next is a 10' x 20' enclosure where they start playing with the other cubs. The final stage is a 35' x 45' enclosure where they spend the majority of their time until they are released.

How long do cubs stay at the IBBR? The average stay of a cub at the facility is seven to eight months but some may stay as long as 15 months. Generally, cubs are born in February where they stay in the den with their mothers until they are four weeks old. The cubs are generally two months or older when they are brought to Sally, but she has received some cubs young enough that they had to be fed formula from a dropper. If cubs come in later in the summer, they are generally underweight and require more attention including special food such as formula for older cubs who are sick or malnourished. If they are healthy, the cubs are put into temporary dens in November and moved to real dens in December. Some cubs stay until the following June depending on when they arrived and their health.

How big are black bears? Unlike their grizzly cousins who weigh 300 - 1500 pounds fully grown, black bears are smaller and weigh between 125 - 500 pounds for an adult male and 90 - 275 pounds for an adult female, varying from state to state. In Idaho, males weigh between 250-280 pounds and females weigh 120-140 pounds. IBBR has received infant cubs that weighed less than a pound but the typical cub is in the five pound range when received in the spring. The species is not particularly dangerous to humans, being only responsible for a few deaths, as well as occasional property damage and livestock predation.

Do the bears get along? Maughan installed several cameras one year to monitor the cubs so she could observe the social interaction between the bears when they were just "being bears". Even with several bears in the enclosures together Maughan has rarely seen an aggressive disagreement between the cubs. There is the typical bickering between siblings and the process to establish pecking order but never an attempt to harm one another.

What can I do to help? Since contact with the bears is limited, there isn't an opportunity for you and I to go and get 'hands on' exposure to the animals in a volunteer capacity. There is however yard work and cleaning that would be greatly appreciated. You can e-mail IBBR at info@ibbr.org to arrange a time if you want to serve Maughan and the staff. The best donation we can give to IBBR is a cash-donation (tax deductible) so they can purchase what they need. They accept cash or check donations, PayPal, or credit cards via PayPal. You can make an online donation at <http://www.bearrehab.org/funding.html>. IBBR has an annual operating budget of \$40,000 – more if they help an above average number of cubs. The special formula for the younger cubs is quite expensive costing \$215 every two to three weeks depending on the number of residents. Additionally, donations of ripe fruit, canned blueberry pie filling (the bears like the sweetness in their formula), Fred Meyer large chunk dog food (the cubs play with the small chunk – typical kid!), fruit flavored yogurt, or cottage cheese are also helpful.



Photo Courtesy of IBBR



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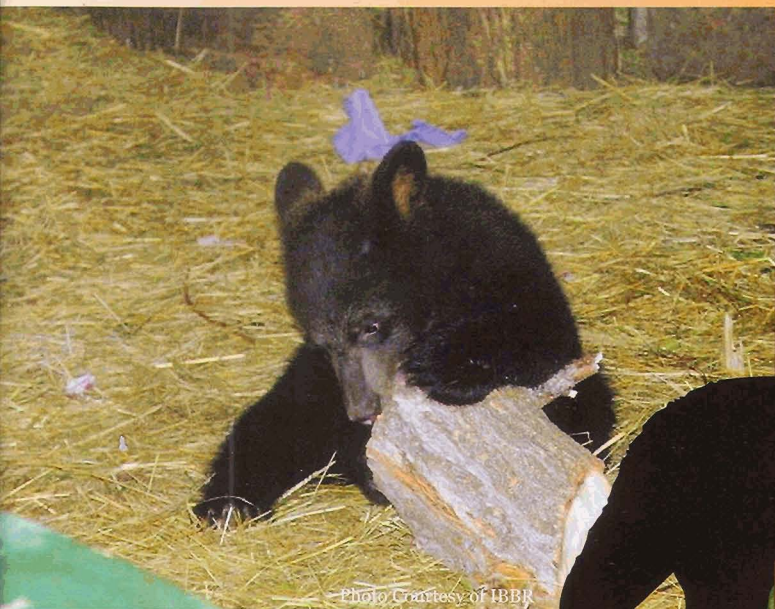


Photo Courtesy of IBBR

There is detailed information on the IBBR website if you want to order formula and have it sent directly to IBBR. There is also a list of non-food items that IBBR would love to have donated. Their current cameras are getting outdated so Maughan is looking for one or two Canon point-and-shoot digital cameras, a newer PC to use for educational visits to schools, some kennels for transporting the cubs and a few other items.

What DO black bears eat? Black bears (*Ursus americanus*) eat primarily fruit, vegetables, grass, fish, mice and kibble such as dog food. They also love berries!

Lysa is an Idaho native who loves the outdoors – especially spending time in the mountains. Her family is her primary focus and consists of her husband, a son-in-law, 3 daughters, 3 grandsons and 3 cats. Lysa enjoys spending time with people of all ages, learning about what inspires and motivates them.