

Black bear

Ursus americanus

The black bear is one of the largest animals living in Pennsylvania. The species ranges through much of forested North America from Mexico to Alaska and from Florida to northern Canada.

Habitat

both coniferous and deciduous forests, as well as open alpine habitats.



50-85 Inches

poor vision
tan muzzle
good sense of smell



glossy, black fur
3-5 in tail
bears walk flat-footed or "plantigrade"

Average 140-400 lbs. Adult males are larger and heavier than females

Scat

Black bear scat reveals what they ate. Since the diet is 85% vegetation, scat may be tubular, include seeds, and may be loose.



Tracks

Flat-footed, large. Five toes front and back. Claws apparent in track. Negative space between the toes is filled with fur.



Diet

Bears find food mainly by scent. They are opportunistic feeders, with a largely vegetarian diet. Common foods are fruit (including large amounts of berries), mast (acorns, hickory nuts and beechnuts), succulent leaves, grasses, insects (including eggs and larvae), plant roots, amphibians, reptiles, small mammals, fish, carrion, newborn fawns, birdseed and garbage.



Reproduction

Bears mate from early June to mid-July. 1-5 cubs are born during early January and are covered with fine dark hair. They are about 9 inches long and weigh 8 to 10 ounces. Their eyes and ears are closed. After six weeks, their eyes open and two weeks after that they walk. They leave the den when 3 months old, are weaned by 7 months, and by fall usually weigh 60 to 100 pounds. Mothers and 1-year-old cubs will den together again the winter after their birth. The family group disbands the following spring, when the female is ready to breed again.

? Hibernation: fact or fiction?

Hibernation in bears more closely resembles resting than the deep torpor characteristic of other species. During hibernation, bears are alert and capable of fleeing or defending the den. Body temperature is not drastically reduced, but respiration and heart rate decline some. Bears do not urinate or defecate while dormant. On warm, late-winter days, they might emerge and wander nearby.



Visit www.pgc.pa.gov for more information on black bears in Pennsylvania