



(Photo: BC Parks)

## 2.2 BEAR: Grizzly Bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*)

### Appearance and Size

Grizzlies are large, heavy-bodied bears that can weigh up to 680 kg, with the average weight ranging from 270 kg to 360 kg. Average adult grizzlies reach nose-to-tail lengths of 1.8 m but have been recorded as long as 2.7 m. The long, outer guard hairs of the grizzly are often



(Photo: Dave Dickson, ICBC)

tipped with white, silver, or cream giving the bear the grizzled appearance its name denotes. Coat colour can be various shades of blond, brown, black, or a combination of these, and can be affected by spring shedding, growth of new hair, nutrition, and climate. Coat colour is not a good characteristic for distinguishing between black bears and Grizzly Bears. Black bears and grizzly bears sometimes look similar, but grizzlies are usually larger and are seldom completely black. Grizzlies

have a prominent shoulder hump, which is lacking in black bears, and a dish-shaped face instead of the straight facial profile of the black. Grizzlies have much longer claws, adapted for digging, while black bears have shorter, curved claws, well suited for tree climbing.

### Life History

Grizzly bears have one of the lowest reproductive rates of North American terrestrial mammals. Females reach reproductive maturity between four and seven years of age, and once mature, normally produce young every two to three years. The breeding season begins in late May and lasts until mid-July. The gestation period is relatively short (7 to 9 months). One to four, usually two, cubs are born in the den in January or February. The cubs will remain with the female for two or three years, during which time she does not breed. Grizzlies rarely live past the age of 25.



(Photo: Tourism BC)



(Photo: Dave Dickson, ICBC)

## Abundance and Distribution

Grizzly Bears inhabit most of the province except the Queen Charlotte Islands, the Lower Mainland, and portions of the south-central interior. (*Map 2.2.2*) While they are not common on Vancouver Island, a cub was found on the northern end of the island in 2003.



(Photo: Jim Peaco, US National Park Service)

Bears occur in all major biogeoclimatic areas and utilize habitats ranging from coastal estuaries to alpine meadows. Habitat use is primarily influenced by the presence of food, denning and mating sites, and other bears. Home ranges vary in size depending on the individual bear and the locality, ranging from less than fifty to hundreds of square kilometres. Coastal bears tend to have smaller home ranges than do interior bears. Home ranges of males are generally larger than those of females. Given their secretive nature, affinity for

wilderness areas and low population densities, accurate counts of Grizzly Bear populations are almost impossible. Current estimates put the B.C. population at about 10,000 bears, approximately one-quarter of the North American population.

Text and map adapted from: British Columbia Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, 1994b.



(Photo: US National Park Service)



front track  
about 25 cm (10") long



hind track  
about 30 cm (12") long



walking tracks



Adapted from: McDougall (1997); and Sheldon and Hartson (1999).



(Photo: Leonard Sielecki, BCMoT)

## Characteristic Features



(Photo: Leonard Sielecki, BCMoT)



(Photo: Leonard Sielecki, BCMoT)

Map 2.2.2

