

## 2.2 BEAR: Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*: ssp: *altifrontalis*, *carlottae*, *cinnamomum*, *kermodei*, *vancouveri*)

### Appearance and Size

Black bears have a bulky body, small black eyes, a broad head, rounded ears, a short tail, and a fine, long hairy covering. Usually, their fur is uniformly black, except for a tan muzzle and a white "V" on the chest. Black bears can range in colour from black to white, with cinnamon, brown and blonde not being uncommon. A blue-coloured black bear or "glacier" bear is rare. Adult size and weight varies greatly according to sex, season, food supply, and geographic area. Adult males measure about 60 cm to 90 cm in shoulder height and 130 cm to 190 cm in length and weigh 80 kg to 300 kg. Females are smaller, weighing 40 kg to 140 kg.



(Photo: Tourism BC)

### Life History

Black bears have low reproductive rates compared to many other mammals. Females typically do not reach sexual maturity until four years of age, and breed only every two to three years after that. Where food is scarce, females might not bear their first litter until they are six or seven years old. Most males don't mature sexually until age five or six. Although black bears can live for 25 to 30 years in captivity, their life-span in the wild is usually much shorter. Black bears in British Columbia usually mate from early June to mid-July. Cubs are born in January or February, during hibernation. While litter sizes vary from one to five, black bears usually have two cubs. Cubs nurse while the mother continues hibernating and weigh 3 kg to 5 kg when they leave the den in spring. Cubs stay with their mother their entire first year and sometimes longer. For bears hibernation



(Photo: Tourism BC)



(Photo: Bryan Harry)



(Photo: BC Parks)

is an important survival strategy, where their main foods, green vegetation, berries, salmon and insects are not available in winter. Black bears usually hibernate for three to five months on the south coast and for longer periods (probably five to seven months) in the interior and the north. Females, in particular pregnant ones, hibernate longer than males.

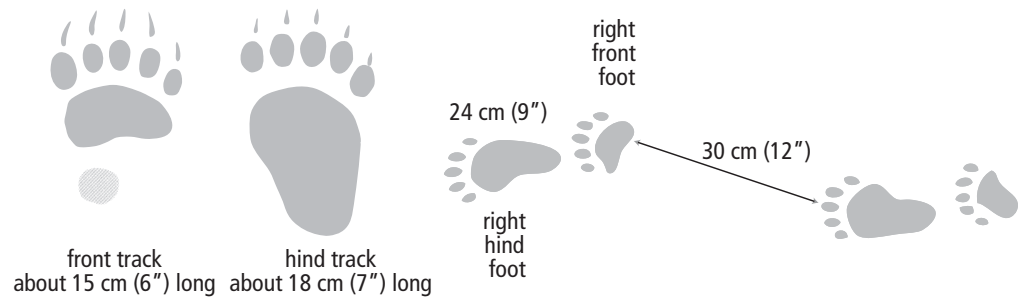
## Abundance and Distribution

British Columbia supports one of the largest populations of black bears in North America. Black bear numbers vary from year to year but their population in British Columbia is estimated to be between 120,000 and 160,000 bears. This is about one quarter of all black bears in Canada. One of the most widely distributed mammals in British Columbia, the black bear is found in forestland across the province. Its natural range includes Vancouver Island and most coastal islands to the north, including the Queen Charlottes. (*Map 2.2.1*) Although bears are generally absent from alpine, grassland, and heavily settled landscapes, they often are found close to the fringes of communities and sometimes wander into them. Bear numbers are higher in wet climatic zones, where vegetation is more plentiful, than in dry regions. Coastal bear densities are higher because of access to spawning salmon.



(Photo: R. Robinson, BCMoT)

Text and map adapted from: British Columbia Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, 2001.



Adapted from: McDougall (1997); Shomon (1969) and Sheldon and Hartson (1999).



(Photo: Dave Dickson, ICBC)

## Characteristic Features



(Photo: Leonard Sielecki, BCMoT)



(Photo: Leonard Sielecki, BCMoT)

**Map 2.2.1**

