



Grizzly Bear

National Wildlife Refuge System

- Grizzly bears are great symbols of the wild. They are also the most aggressive of all bears. Although they are not territorial and they rarely fight, when they do, they usually win.
- Fossil records show that the first bears appeared in Europe about 13 million years ago.
- Grizzly bears – *Ursus arctos horribilis* -- have a distinctive hump on their shoulders and long claws – about two to four inches. Both the hump and the claws are traits associated with the bear’s exceptional digging ability. Grizzlies, which stand six feet tall and weight from 200-650 pounds -- are often dark brown, but their color can vary from very light cream to black.
- Grizzlies are omnivores and skilled fishermen. They can eat seeds, berries, fish, roots, grasses, rodents, insects and occasionally other mammals, such as deer and elk. They also eat carrion (dead flesh), which they can smell from as far as 18 miles away.
- When they kill a large animal – like a caribou – they select one that is young, weakened or wounded. The kill can last a sow and her cubs for four or five days. Grizzlies can use their sharp claws to dig out smaller prey such as ground squirrels.
- Grizzlies feed heavily in the late summer and early fall – a period of two to four months called “hyperphagia” -- to build their bodies’ reserves for winter denning, when they fall into a torpor – similar to hibernation. During hyperphagia, they can gain more than three pounds a day.
- Male grizzlies attract mates by making low snorts and nibbling the females’ backs and necks. Gestation takes 180-250 days; birth takes place in the den during winter.
- Newborn cubs are blind, toothless and almost harmless. They are eight inches long and weigh a little more than a pound. Cubs stay in the den with their mother until spring.
- Historically, there were around 50,000 grizzly bears in North America. Today, an estimated 1,800 grizzly bears remain in five populations in the lower 48 states. Alaska is home to a healthy grizzly population.



Grizzly Bear/USFWS



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