
The Audubon Society
Field Guide to
North American Mammals

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Visual key by Carol Nehring

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294, 295 **Grizzly Bear, including Brown Bears**
(*Ursus arctos*)

Description: *Yellowish-brown to black*, often with white-tipped hairs, giving grizzled appearance. *Hump over shoulders*. Facial profile usually somewhat concave. Outer pair of incisors larger than inner 2. Claws of front feet nearly 4" (10 cm) long. Height at shoulders about 4¼' (130 cm). L 6-7' (180-213 cm); T 3" (76 mm); HF 10¼" (26 cm); Wt 323-1,496 lb. (147-680 kg).

Similar Species: Black Bear is smaller, lacks shoulder hump, and has all 3 pairs of upper incisors equal in size. Alaskan Brown Bear (*U.a. middendorffi*), once regarded as a separate species, is a typically brown northwestern coastal Grizzly, usually 800-1,200 lb. at 8-9 years of age, but reaching 1,700 lb., making it the world's largest terrestrial carnivore.

Sign: Shallowly dug depression and a high, loose mound of branches, earth, or natural debris heaped over it conceal a cache of carrion or a kill. Beware of this sign, for a bear will not be far away. Other signs include overturned rocks, torn-up berry patches, raggedly rooted round, torn logs, girdled, bark-stripped, clawed, and bitten "bear trees" (marks higher than those made by Black Bears, with largest tooth marks higher than a man's head and claw slashes perhaps twice as high). Hair tufts on trees, which may be polished from rubbing over several seasons. Large, gaping pits indicate that Grizzlies have dug for rodents. A wide, deep snowslide is occasionally gouged by a Grizzly sliding down a short incline on its haunches.

Bed: Usually in thickets, oval depression about 1' deep, 3' wide, 4' long, matted with leaves or needles and sometimes small boughs.

Scat: Usually cylindrical, often more



than 2" wide; and, like Black Bear's, possibly showing animal hair, vegetation fibers or husks. Droppings may be rounded, or massed in areas where vegetation is the primary food.

Trail: Trampled in tall grass, may undulate, and is marked by deep depressions.

Tracks: Shaped and placed like those of Black Bear but larger and with different claw marks; the long, relatively straight foreclaws print farther ahead of toe pads, and hindclaws register only occasionally. Hindprint of a large Grizzly may be 10–12" long and 7–8" wide in the front; foreprint often as wide, about half as long. In soft mud, tracks may be even larger. Even on hard ground, Alaskan Brown Bears often leave bigger prints, with hindtracks more than 16" long, 10½" wide, and sunk 2" deep in hard sand. Stride averages 2', may be 8–9' during a bounding run.

Breeding: Mates late June–early July; 1 litter of 1–4, average 2, born January–March every other year. Young are exceptionally small, the size of rats, and weigh only 1 lb.

Habitat: Semi-open country usually in mountainous areas.

Range: Alaska, Yukon, and Mackenzie District of Northwest Territories south through most of British Columbia and w Alberta to s central Nevada.

Primarily nocturnal, the great, shaggy Grizzly has a low, clumsy walk, swinging its head back and forth, but when necessary it can lope as fast as a horse. Grizzly cubs can climb, though not as nimbly as Black Bear cubs, but lose the ability during their first year. In winter, Grizzlies put on a layer of fat, as much as 400 lb., and become lethargic. They den up in a protected spot, such as a cave, crevice, hollow tree, or a hollow dug out under a rock, returning year after year to a good den.

Not being true hibernators, they can be awakened easily. Omnivorous, they feed on many kinds of plants, including roots or sprouts, fungi, berries, fish, insects, large and small mammals, and carrion. When salmon migrate upstream to spawn, these normally solitary bears congregate along rivers, and vicious fights may erupt among them. More often, they establish dominance through size and threats, spacing themselves out, with the largest, most aggressive individuals taking the choicest stations. The Grizzly is adept at catching fish with a swift snap of its huge jaws. Occasionally it will pin a fish underwater with its forepaws, then thrust its head underwater to clasp the catch in its teeth. It digs insects from rotting logs and small mammals from their burrows, sometimes tearing up much ground in the process. It caches the remains of larger mammals, such as Elk, Moose, Mountain Goats, sheep, or livestock, returning to the cache until all meat is consumed. While the Grizzly normally avoids man, it is the most unpredictable and dangerous of all bears. Although in captivity a Grizzly has lived 47 years, the life span in the wild is 15–34 years.

296 Polar Bear (*Ursus maritimus*)

Description: *White fur*; black nose pad, lips, and eyes. Relatively long legs and long neck. Ears very small. Males considerably larger than females. Height at shoulder about 4' (120 cm). L 7–11' (213–335 cm); T 3½–5½" (8–13 cm); HF 13" (33 cm); Wt 924–1,100 lb. (420–500 kg).

Sign: A seal carcass, partly eaten but with no blubber remaining. Wheeling, calling gulls sometimes mark the location of

such a carcass, as may the presence of Arctic Foxes or their tracks in association with bear tracks.

Scat: Large, dark, cylindrical, like that of big Grizzly.

Tracks: Similar to those of the largest Grizzlies but smaller, rounder, blurred by hair. Hindprint 12–13" long, usually at least 9" wide. Claws, though sharp enough to grip ice or slippery snow when the bear runs, are short and seldom leave marks in front of prints. Any bear track on an ice floe is a Polar Bear's.

Breeding: Mates April–May; litters of 1–4 (average 2) born November–January every other year (or sometimes every third year) while females are in their winter dens, excavations in snowbanks, ice ridges, or hillsides. Cubs weigh about 2 lb. at birth; they remain with mother about 1½ years, denning with her the winter after their birth.

Habitat: Broken ice packs at northern edge of the continent, near North Pole; seldom far inland.

Range: Extreme n Canada and Alaska and on Arctic islands.

Unlike most North American bears, which are primarily nocturnal, the Polar Bear is active at all times of the year, searching for prey on both long summer days and long winter nights. Adaptations to its Arctic existence include color, which blends with the snowy environment and so provides useful camouflage for avoiding enemies and capturing prey; large size, which helps maintain temperature by reducing surface-heat loss; and furred feet, which insulate against cold and provide traction on icy surfaces. Because the hairs of its waterproof fur are hollow, they are especially insulating and increase the bear's buoyancy when swimming. An excellent swimmer, it paddles at about 6½ mph with front feet only, hindfeet trailing.

unique among 4-footed land animals—and can remain submerged about 2 minutes. While swimming or treading water, it stretches its long neck for a better view, as it does on land. Owing to the scarcity of plants in its icy habitat, it is the most carnivorous North American bear, with canine teeth larger and molariform teeth sharper than in other bears. Acute scenting ability enables the Polar Bear to locate prey even when hidden by drifts or pressure ridges. It stalks seal young and sometimes adults and young Walrus often by swimming underwater to their ice floes. While Hair Seals are its staple, it also feeds on fish, birds and their eggs, small mammals, dead animals (including whales), shellfish, crabs, starfish, and mushrooms, grasses, berries, and algae, when available. It hollows out a winter den in a protected snowbank, where it remains in a lethargic condition from November to March. Males den for much shorter periods, from late November to late January, or may be abroad occasionally at any time of the year. One of the world's largest denning areas for Polar Bears, on the lowlands of Hudson Bay and James Bay, was discovered in 1969 and is the only known region where they den in earth rather than in snow. They excavate caves in lake and stream banks and peat hummocks by digging down to the permafrost. This area is far south for the species, and it is believed that they use the permafrost dens again in summer to cool off. No large denning areas have yet been found in Alaska; some Polar Bears in that region may winter in Siberia, drifting across to Alaska on ice floes in spring. Polar Bears are a source of food and hides for Eskimoes. There are several recorded cases of attacks on men by Polar Bears.