

Florida Black Bear

Size & Appearance:

- adult females average about 180 pounds
- adult males average about 300 pounds
- coats mostly black with a brown muzzle.

Range:

- average range for an adult male: 50 sq miles
- average range for an adult female: 10 sq miles
- male and female territories overlap, but same sex territories do not overlap

Habitat:

- bears use whatever habitats provide suitable food
- habitats may change with the seasons
- prefer thick swamps, forested areas with dense understory, pine flatwoods, and sand pine scrub

Diet:

- omnivorous, but around 80% of diet is plant material; depending on the time of year, it may include acorns, blueberries, palmetto berries, and cabbage palm seeds
- also eat insects including bees and wasps, bird nestlings, and small mammals including armadillos and wild pigs
- opportunistic and will eat cat food and dog food left outside homes as well as birdseed and garbage

Reproduction:

- mate from May to July
- females breed for the first time at 3.5 years of age, give birth at age 4, then reproduce every other year
- 2 cubs born in January–February, but 1–3 not uncommon; cubs about size of large cantaloupe at birth
- mother doesn't hibernate but creates a den-like nesting area in palmetto and goes into sort of a stupor in the spring when the cubs are born
- cubs stay with mother for about 18 months

Behavior:

- solitary and timid, but mothers fearless when protecting their cubs
- excellent senses of smell and very good hearing, but are a little nearsighted
- often stand on hind legs to help them smell and see more accurately
- normally active during the day but may become nocturnal in areas of high human activity

Moving on:

Adult males don't tolerate other bears in their territories. When a young male bear reaches about a year and a half, its mother shuns it, forcing it to seek its own home range and food sources. Since an adult male will kill it if it comes into the adult's territory, the young males frequently wander into urban developments (compared to the adult male bears, people are the lesser of two evils). Given the chance, it will figure out that it's in the wrong place and return to the forest on its own.

Bears & people:

- encounters in a natural setting are almost always harmless
- there has never been a documented attack on a person by a bear in Florida

Reporting a bear in urban areas:

- call Florida Fish & Game Commission (Naples Field Office 643-4220)
- bears have accurate homing instinct; when relocated from human-populated areas, usually find way back

Future:

- number and distribution of bears being reduced by extensive habitat loss and fragmentation of forested areas as habitats being altered to meet needs of expanding human populations
- because each adult bear vigorously defends its territory, there are increasingly few areas where young bears can go to establish themselves with their own territories



A young male uses strangler fig roots to help it climb down a cypress tree behind the Alligator Den Shelter. It had been feeding on figs, tore apart a dead limb looking for grubs and insects, and then came down to have a little alligator flag stalk.