

# BOGDIVERSITY THURSDAY



—*from Head Naturalist Clinton*

## American Black Bear

POST #47—October 13, 2022

One of the most attractive features to birds and visitors in the Sax-Zim Bog during the winter season are bird feeders. If you have visited during the summer months, you will notice a distinct lack of feeders on the landscape. Why? The reason for no feeders during the summer is our featured species on today's BogDiversity Thursday: American Black Bear!

Black bears are very typical of many of the large mammals found in the Sax-Zim Bog: only a few people ever see one, often for a very short amount of time, and the sighting leaves you buzzing for the next few visits! In Minnesota, black bears are found primarily in the north-central and northeastern parts of Minnesota. However, this species is known to wander, especially during the fall, and has been seen well south of its normal range.

The diet of a black bear changes seasonally. In the spring, they take advantage of newly green vegetation. They transition to insects and ants during the middle of the summer, and rely on nuts to fatten up during the fall. Black bears are also adept

scavengers, taking advantage of dead animals, as well as garbage. Although they are not primarily carnivorous, White-tailed Deer fawns make up a portion of black bear diets.

An important part in the life of a black bears in our area is hibernation. In Minnesota, both male and female black bears hibernate. Only female black bears hibernate in the southern parts of their range. Hibernation for black bears is long, up to 7 months in northern Minnesota. During this time, female black bears give birth to two or more cubs in dens. Black bears typically start their hibernation in late fall following a period of hyperphagie to pack on fat and begin emerging in late-March. Incredibly efficient hibernators, black bears rely on fat stores for energy, lower the body temperatures, and slow their metabolisms such that they not only loose a surprisingly little amount of weight, but maintain their muscle mass after this long period of inactivity.

While some interactions between black bears and people are less than desirable (ie pulling down bird feeders, tipping over garbage cans), black bears are very shy and are typically skittish. Relating more positively to people, black bears are culturally significant to Ojibwe people in our state. One of the seven primary Ojibwe clans is represented by the black bear and one of the names for the month of/moon during February is called makwa-giizis or makoons-giizis meaning the bear moon or bear cub moon!

More information about this amazing mammal below!

(Main photos by Sparky Stensaas; track photo by Head Naturalist Clinton)



This rather large bear track was found along the road at Wood Thrush Woods! Bears have very distinct tracks and for most, this sign is all you ever see of them!



An all too common sight if you leave your feeders out too late in the spring or put them up too early in the fall. Bears have definitely taken down feeders on more than one occasion at the Welcome Center!



Black bears have larger ears than other bears in North America and a distinct profile, with haunches higher than their shoulders.



Bears need to pack on lots of fat prior to their hibernation. Rose hips, acorns, and other fatty foods are sought out, even to the point of long-distance movements south of their range.



A variable species, not all Black Bears are black! While all Black Bears have brown muzzles, some individuals might sport white blazes on their chest; in the western part of their range they may have a brown/cinnamon morph; and there are populations off the coast of British Columbia that are white! Only a few individuals in Minnesota are brown, but they do occur from time to time.