



March 2009

# ZOOM

in on america

A Monthly Publication of the U.S. Consulate Krakow

Volume VI. Issue 57.

## Close Encounters with Wildlife



*Black bear cubs. Photo © AP Images*

Like all little animals, these two bear cubs immediately warm and win our hearts. If we came across such a playful duo while walking along some nature trail, wouldn't we be tempted to pet them, cuddle them or treat them to something delicious we have in our backpack? We probably would, but... that would be about the worst thing we could do. First of all, we would put ourselves in great danger. The cubs' mother is probably close by, suspicious of anything that might endanger her offspring. She would most certainly take us for a threat. Then, she might attack... Petting little cubs could also do them harm. Wild animals are better off if they stay away from and never get used to human beings. Their inborn fear and caution is their best safeguard.

America's magnificent national parks offer spectacular landscapes for nature lovers. For animals they are home. Park management and staff look for ways to let people enjoy America's parks without adversely affecting fragile park ecosystems. This wasn't always the case. Decades ago, for the entertainment of tourists, bear feeding areas were designated in the parks. Today, fines are imposed on those who do not store food properly in parks where bears are prevalent. Watch and enjoy from a distance as well as respect seem to be the keywords when observing wildlife like the American black bears.

# WILDLIFE SUCCESS STORIES



A grizzly bear Photo © AP Images



A bald eagle Photo © AP Images



A beaver Photo © AP Images

Although the grizzly bear once inhabited “The Golden State” abundantly, today we can see it only on the California flag. The reason why the grizzly can no longer be seen anywhere in the state’s 423,970km<sup>2</sup> territory is that the white settlers who arrived in the state in the 19th century found it a threat to their life and property. As a result, grizzlies were killed in great numbers. The last one was reported to have been shot in 1922 in the Sierra foothills. Grizzlies can no longer be found in California, but fortunately they have not disappeared from the map of the U.S. They live in such states as Washington, Idaho, and Montana. Their population is now estimated at about one thousand and preservation organizations are working to increase grizzly numbers.

The bald eagle is America’s national bird. We see its image on the U.S. Great Seal and the bald eagle appears on American currency. However, in the mid-20th century, the bald eagle population in the U.S. neared extinction. From an estimate of about half a million birds, just 400 nesting pairs were counted. There were many reasons why the national bird of America found itself on an endangered species list. Illegal hunting was one reason, but the most harm was done to the bald eagle population in the 1940s and 1950s by the infamous pesticide DDT (Dichloro-Diphenyl-Trichloroethane), which was widely used as an insect killer. DDT turned out to also be a silent killer of other animals. Widespread use of DDT adversely affected bald eagle reproduction. The eagles’ egg shells became so brittle that they couldn’t withstand the weight of the brooding parent. This led the species to the

verge of extinction. Fortunately, with the DDT ban that was implemented in the early 1970s, the bald eagle population rebounded. After forty years on the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants, the bald eagle population was high enough to be removed from the endangered species list on June 28, 2007.

Beavers are amazingly clever, skillful and unthreatening animals. And yet even their existence was endangered when, in the 19th century, they were extensively trapped for their fur. It is amazing to observe beavers’ activity and social life. Their engineering skills are astounding. Beavers make dams, burrows, lodges, and canals, which they use for floating logs. The entrance to a beaver lodge is located under water in order to keep intruders out. The family resides in the living quarters above the water level. These skillful builders do not forget about a “pantry”, where their supplies are stored for the winter. What got beavers into trouble in the past were their extraordinary engineering skills. Beaver dams have a considerable impact on a large territory. Lakes form following the construction of a dam, which may be beneficial in creating wetlands, but these lakes may also interfere with local farms. Farmers joined fur trappers in eliminating a sizeable percentage of the American beaver population. However, this was put to a stop in the first half of the 20th century. The beaver population made a recovery beginning in the 1940s, and now their population is estimated at between 10-15 million animals. The best habitats for beavers are naturally national parks, where they are free to build their dams as they wish.

Text by AIRC Krakow



All photos © AP Images

# IN BEAR COUNTRY



A bear-proof dumpster in Sequoia NP Photo © Bożena Grzebień



In Kings Canyon National Park Photo © Bożena Grzebień



A Yosemite bear Photo © Bożena Grzebień



Grizzly Falls in Kings Canyon Photo © Bożena Grzebień

It was a late July afternoon when I was walking back from Upper Yosemite Fall to the Valley Visitor Center, where I had left my car. The time around dusk is very special in Yosemite National Park. It gets so peaceful and quiet. Having left the roaring falls behind, I now felt the tranquility of the forest trail. It was pleasantly cool after a hot day filled with driving and trekking. It got so quiet in fact that a noise of a tree branch cracking under someone's foot startled me. I stopped and looked around, but I didn't notice anybody. I continued down the path and after some twenty meters or so I saw people positioned behind trees, very still, cameras in hands, looking in the direction I came from. I turned slowly, following their eyes, and, there he was - a Yosemite black bear just off the footpath. He was rubbing the sides of his huge body against a tree and appeared highly preoccupied with this activity. I realized that I had just passed right by him. I walked very quietly to where the others were hiding and found an empty tree. Though the distance now seemed safe, I did feel a thrill of excitement and my hands were a bit shaky, which you can see in the photo above. We all watched the bear walk around the trees for a little while, each from our "shelter". After about ten minutes, the bear walked deeper into the forest and disappeared. When I was getting back in my car, I remembered what I read on the Yosemite National Park's website: "Visitors who spot a bear sauntering across a meadow or eating berries in a wetland should consider themselves lucky." Though it wasn't exactly a meadow or wetland where I spotted the bear, I did consider myself lucky.

The black bear population in Yosemite is estimated to be between 300 and 500 animals. Adult males weigh up to 350 pounds while females weigh up to 250 pounds. Some people may find it strange, but black bears are not necessarily black. In fact most that inhabit Yosemite are brown. Blond or reddish brown bears are not uncommon. The staple diet of black bears is grass and berries with acorns. During winter, bears sleep in hollow trees or logs, under the root mass of trees or in caves. In this hibernation state of half-sleep mother bears give birth to their cubs. Usually between one and three cubs are born.

A cartoon "Yogi Bear", extremely popular in its time (1960s, 70s and 80s), was the creation of William Hanna and Joseph Barbera. The cartoon featured a clever bear named Yogi who lives in Jellystone Park and appears to have an inexhaustible supply of ideas on how to get into the park visitors' picnic baskets. Accompanied by a not-so-clever friend, a small bear named Boo Boo, Yogi frequently gets in conflict with the park ranger, but he never seems to lose optimism and high esteem of himself because he believes he is "smarter than the average bear."

The cartoon is not that far from reality. Real bears, whether smarter than an average one or not, can search for and find a tourist's food supply. With their excellent sense of smell and resourcefulness (plus a bear's human-like tendency to be lazy), a bear can easily detect high-calorie, nourishing food that practically all of the 4 million tourists who visit Yosemite each year carry in their backpacks, tents and cars.

"Don't turn your back to your food," the Park Service advises. Yosemite staff tell visitors not to leave food, garbage, toiletries and anything that has "a scent, regardless of packaging" unprotected in cars. If you leave the car windows or doors open, you'll get yourself in trouble. You may have to pay up to \$ 5,000 for such carelessness. And ... rightly so! Inviting a bear for an easy "meal" may well have fatal consequences for ... the bear. It has been proven that if bears become used to human food, they lose their natural fear of man, habitually break into cars (see a short video on the Yosemite NPS website showing how skillfully these huge, but fit and clever animals treat themselves to food left unprotected inside cars:

<http://www.nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/fdvideo.htm>) and may become aggressive. Sometimes, the bear may have to be killed in order to protect tourists. The best solution is to keep all food in special bear canisters that can be rented in tourist centers in Yosemite.

While it is a joy and a thrill to see bears in the wild, we need to remember that their well-being is to a large extent dependent on our wise conduct. After all, we are just visitors to bear country.

Text by BG, AIRC Krakow

# ACTIVITY PAGE

## Win a Prize!

March 2009 CONTEST

Give an example of a species that was on the edge of extinction but was reintroduced into its natural habitat in the U.S.?

Send the answer (with your home address) to:  
zoom@usinfo.pl

Deadline: April 5

## Win a Prize!

The answer in the February 2009 Contest:

In 2008 the NPS in Death Valley celebrated its 75th year of service

Thank you for participating

The winners are:  
Leszek, Bogusława and Mirosław

CONGRATULATIONS  
The prizes will be sent to you by mail

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■ Exercise 1 What do you call these animals when they are young?  
e.g. dog - puppy:

a. cow, b. cat, c. pig, d. sheep, e. lion, f. bear, g. horse, h. goose, i. duck, j. eagle, k. hen

■ Exercise 2 Where do they live? e.g. dog - kennel:

a. beaver, b. spider, c. snail, d. wasp, e. cow, f. bird, g. horse, h. bee, i. bear, j. fox

■ Exercise 3 Work in groups:

1. Do you have a pet? If yes, tell other students about her or him.

- What is his/her name?
- How old is he/she?
- How did you get the pet?
- Who feeds the pet?
- Who takes the pet take for a walk?
- What is nice about having a pet?
- Does the pet get into trouble?

If you don't have a pet at the moment, tell other students if you would like to have one. Why? Why not?

2. What wild animals live in your country or area?

3. Have you ever seen an animal in the wild? Tell others about this experience

## Glossary

(in the order of appearance)

cubs - the young of a fox, bear, lion, or other carnivorous mammal  
cuddle - hold close in one's arms  
offspring - (here): animal's young  
prevalent - widespread in a particular area  
abundantly - in large quantities  
adversely - harmful, unfavorable  
brittle - hard but liable to break easily  
brood - sit on eggs to hatch them  
rebound - recover in volume, amount, or strength  
pantry - a small room in which food, dishes, and utensils are kept  
saunter - walk in a slow, relaxed manner  
staple - a main element of something  
resourcefulness - ability to find clever ways to overcome difficulties

(on the basis of *The New Oxford American Dictionary*)

## Lighter Side

There are ... Bears in the city of Chicago. They call themselves "Chicago Bears" and they are a sports team. What do they play?

Chicago Bears Mascot "Staley"



Photo © AP Images

The following idioms all have the word "bear", but they do not refer to "bears".

Guess their meaning and later check in the key:

1. bear fruit
2. bear in mind
3. grin and bear it
4. loaded for bear