



# Louisiana Black Bear

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The Louisiana black bear, *Ursus americanus luteolus*, is federally listed as a threatened species. It is one of 16 recognized subspecies of the American black bear, *U. americanus*. This bear was formerly widespread in North America, from Alaska to Mexico. The Louisiana black bear is distinguished from other black bears by a longer and narrower skull and it possesses proportionately larger molar teeth. They are big, bulky mammals. They have brown muzzles and long black hair, although fur can vary in shades of brown or red, and some have white chest patches. Weight ranges between 200 to 400 pounds for males and 120 to 200 pounds for females.

The Louisiana black bear is a habitat generalist and often overwinters in hollow cypress trees either in or along sloughs, lakes or riverbanks in bottomland hardwoods. These bears are mobile, opportunistic, largely herbivorous omnivores that exploit a variety of foods, including insects. The distribution and abundance of foods, particularly mast such as nuts and berries, largely affect their movements. Important elements of black bear habitat include hard and soft mast, escape cover, den sites, travel corridors and minimum human disturbance.

While some females may breed at three years of age, it is likely that most do not breed until they are four. They give birth in late January or early February often while the females are in a hibernation-like state. Litter size ranges from one to three cubs with instances of four cubs on record.

The Louisiana black bear was considered numerous at the time of early colonization, serving as food both for Native Americans and white settlers. White man's occupation of the land, hunting and habitat destruction (through conversion of virgin forests to agriculture) all contributed to the bear's population decline. It is now restricted primarily to the Tensas and Atchafalaya river basins in Louisiana. However, black bear sightings are on the rise in Mississippi, especially in the delta. Bear restoration efforts are currently underway and there is hope that breeding populations will return to the state.

Please report bear sightings to Brad Young at the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science at 601-354-7303. Reporting sightings is one of the most important steps in the initial stage of bear restoration in Mississippi, along with education and awareness.

*For more information contact:*

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