



North American Pollinator Protection Campaign

WILDLIFE FACT SHEET

BEAR



The North American Pollinator Protection Campaign (NAPPC) is a tri-national collaboration of diverse partners working to protect pollinators and raise the profile of pollinator issues.

The mission of the NAPPC is to encourage and support actions to benefit the health of pollinating species in North America.

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For more information about how to help pollinators or to make a tax-deductible contribution for pollinator protection, please contact us at: www.NAPPC.org or www.coevolution.org.

*NAPPC is coordinated by the
Coevolution Institute.*

The **Bear family** (Ursidae) includes eight species around the world, each remarkably diverse in habits and physical characteristics. Many populations of bear are classified as vulnerable or endangered, which means that steps must be taken immediately to protect them, their habitats, and their sources of food and shelter.

For almost all species of bear, pollinators provide an important part of the diet, either by themselves as insects and larvae, or by pollinating the plants that produce fruit, nuts, roots, leaves and seeds.



When we think about a bear's diet, oftentimes we are reminded of children's stories such as "Winnie the Pooh," with the image of a bear with its paw stuck in the honey pot.

While it is true that all wild bears are omnivorous, eating many different types of plant and animal material, and that honey is a wonderful source of energy and trace minerals, it is only the **Sun Bear** of Asia that has a specialized, long tongue designed for feeding on honey and insects from tree cavities. **Sun Bears** also depend on insects, pollinated fruits and nuts, and small animals to provide the necessary nutrition for survival. While not enough data is available to determine whether special conservation measures should be taken to protect this species, **Sun Bears** are important members of the ecosystem in which they live, and they depend on pollinators to help supply their food.

In the United States, the **American Black Bear** eats berries and other pollinated fruits, as well as wind-pollinated plant foods such as grass, walnuts, and acorns. **American Black Bear** populations are surviving very well on these wild foods in most of the United States, but certain populations are listed by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service as Federally Threatened in Louisiana, Texas, and Mississippi, with Florida perhaps being listed soon.

Known in several countries throughout the Northern Hemisphere, the **Brown (or Grizzly) Bear** is one of the largest carnivorous land mammals, with no natural predators. Despite their position at the top of the food chain, approximately 80-90% of the **Grizzly Bear's** diet is plant matter, including animal-pollinated fruits, nuts, bulbs, and roots. They also consume insects, carrion, and in the Pacific coast, salmon. **Grizzly Bears** are listed as vulnerable to extinction throughout most of their range.



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How You Can Help Pollinators:

- ❖ Cultivate only native plants that bloom from early spring into late fall, and plant them in clusters.
- ❖ Reduce or eliminate pesticides whenever possible.
- ❖ Include larval host plants in your landscape.
- ❖ Create homes for bees. Leave an occasional dead limb or tree to provide nesting sites for native bees. Build a “bee condo” by drilling holes of varying diameter 3-5 inches deep in a piece of scrap wood mounted to a post or under eaves with southern exposure.
- ❖ Add to nectar resources with a hummingbird feeder.
- ❖ Provide additional resources for butterflies and bees. Put out slices of overripe fruit, or a sponge in a dish of lightly salted water. Use a dripping hose to create a butterfly and bee drinking area. Mix a small bit of sea salt or wood ash into the mud.
- ❖ Learn more about pollinators. Get a guidebook and learn to recognize the pollinators in your neighborhood.
- ❖ Seek more information, and support local, national, and international efforts to promote pollinators and native plant communities.



The **Sloth Bear**, found in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan, consumes a variety of pollinated fruits as well as a product created directly by pollinators: honeycomb! **Sloth Bears** also enjoy eating insects, and with hairless lips, flexible snout and gapped top front teeth, are specially adapted to eating ants and termites. Populations of **Sloth Bears** are vulnerable to extinction throughout their range.

The **Spectacled Bear** of South America is a resident of the Andes mountains, and populations throughout this range are considered vulnerable to extinction. It relies on a diversity of forest foods, including small animals, wind-pollinated grasses, animal-pollinated fruits and berries, bromeliads, and the bulbs of orchids - many of which are pollinated by male mosquitoes. **Spectacled Bears** nest in the trees so that they can easily forage for nearby fruits such as palm nuts – which also require animals for pollination and adequate seed development.



Asiatic Black Bear populations are also vulnerable to extinction, and they can be found climbing trees to collect the pollinated fruits and nuts that comprise the bulk of their diet. While the diet of the endangered **Giant Panda** of China is almost exclusively wind-pollinated bamboo, the highly carnivorous **Polar Bear** will come inland in the summer months in its Arctic habitat to search for animal-pollinated berries and other plant foods. The **Polar Bear** is surviving well in the Arctic, although its future is believed to be dependent on monitoring and conservation.

Bears, like humans and so many other species on the planet, depend greatly on animal pollinators to assist plants in reproducing the leaves, roots, tubers, bulbs, fruits, seeds, and nuts upon which we rely for our food and survival. Without pollinators, what would bears eat? Many species of bear are in danger of extinction. We can help to reverse this negative trend by helping to protect and increase the number of pollinators that help to feed them. Protecting pollinators and the services they provide to the food web is an important step towards ensuring not only the future of bears across the globe, but our own future as well.

References:

¹Boswell, E. 1995. MSU scientist counts moths munched by grizzlies. Sept. 27. MSU News Services. <http://www.montana.edu/wwwpb/ag/moths.html>. Katsumata, E. 1999. Biogeography of the Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos*). Department of Geography, San Francisco State University. <http://bss.sfsu.edu:224/courses/Spring99Projects/grizzly.htm>. Seidensticker, J. and S. Lumpkin. 2004. Bear. Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761572258/Bear.html. © 1997-2004 Microsoft Corporation. All Rights Reserved. Spectacled bear BBC Science & Nature website 2005.

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