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extracts from

Something About a Bear

Written by

Jackie Morris

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For Tamsin and Mike Abbott, who love the woods and
all things wild – and for all the bears of the world
J.M.



JANETTA OTTER-BARRY BOOKS

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Something about a Bear









Jackie Morris

Swimming through the water, where the ice-flow
meets the ocean, lives the great white Polar Bear.
Hunting seals on silent paws, hushed as gentle
falling snow. Skin black, hollow fur,
warm bear in a world of ice.



Brown Bear

Brown Bears are the most widely distributed species of bear in the world, found in parts of eastern Europe, Russia, India, China, Canada and the USA. Once they ranged right across Asia, Europe and America, even in Britain until they were hunted to extinction there, around AD 1000. Of all the Brown Bears the Kodiak Bear is the largest, as big as a Polar Bear. They grow to this size because of the feasts of salmon that they enjoy each year. Brown Bears have huge territories, large teeth, big claws and they can run at 50 miles an hour. Brown Bears hibernate in winter. When a bear hibernates its body temperature drops by two degrees. Its heart rate can drop from 40-70 beats a minute to only 10 beats a minute.

Giant Panda

Pandas are mostly herbivores, eating bamboo, though now and again they eat meat. Their heads are large and they have big, strong jaw muscles for chewing and crunching bamboo. Like most bears the Giant Panda is a solitary animal, preferring to live alone. Pandas do not hibernate in winter. The nourishment they gain from eating bamboo is never enough to build up the layers of fat they would need to hibernate. Pandas live in the remote mountains and forests of China. There are thought to be fewer than 1,600 Giant Pandas in the wild. A newborn Panda is about the same size as a block of butter. In a lifetime a mother Panda will give birth to only five or six cubs. The cubs stay with their mother for up to three years.





Sloth Bear

Sloth Bears love to feed on termites. They use their strong paws and huge claws to rip open the tough nests of termites. Then they push their noses in tight, and blow and suck the termites and eggs through a gap in their front teeth. Very noisy eaters, you can sometimes hear them feeding from far away. They also love to eat fruit (mangoes and figs), as well as flowers. Sloth Bears have long shaggy coats, and they live in the forests of Southern Asia. Sloth Bear cubs ride on their mothers' backs as they move around the forest. This gives the cubs protection from the leopards, tigers and wild dogs that share their territories with the bears.

Spectacled Bear

The Spectacled Bear is South America's only bear. They can be found from Panama to Venezuela. Their favourite habitat is the cloud forests, as high as 14,000 feet above sea level. Their name is derived from their facial markings, and unlike other bears they have a short snout. The Spectacled Bear sleeps in nests in the trees during the day. They eat mostly fruit and nuts, but also rabbits, birds and cacti, berries, grasses and tubors. It is thought that there are only 3,000 Spectacled Bears left in the wild. The bears are threatened by loss of habitat due to logging, and also they are hunted for their fur, paws and bear bile. The Spectacled Bear is the last remaining short-faced bear. Once it had a larger relative, The Florida Spectacled Bear, larger than a Polar Bear.



Find out more about bears at these conservation websites:

http://www.hauserbears.com/
http://www.polarbearsinternational.org/
http://www.moonbears.org.uk/
http://bearwithus.org/
http://www.bsbcc.org.my/
http://www.worldlandtrust.org/



Moon Bear or Asiatic Black Bear

These bears have many names: Moon Bear, Asiatic Black Bear, Himalayan Black Bear, Tibetan Black Bear. Moon Bears are wonderful climbers and love nuts and honey. They roam over huge areas searching for food. Moon Bears live in forests, hills and mountains. Where Moon Bears are found in northern regions they will hibernate, building up layers of fat during the summer, eating nuts and berries, to see them through their period of sleep. Moon Bears are endangered by deforestation, and also by the trade in bear parts for Chinese medicine, including bear bile. Some bears are kept in cages where bile can be extracted from them. Moon Bears are also kept as 'dancing bears' by street musicians, who earn their money playing music while the bears dance.

Polar Bears

Polar Bears are the largest of all the bears. They have an amazing sense of smell, and can sniff out a seal pup through a metre (three feet) of ice. Polar Bears have black skin. Their hair is not white, but transparent, and works as a conductor of heat to their bodies. They move slowly, as despite their freezing environment their black skin and unique hair mean that they overheat easily. To cool off they sometimes lie on their backs with their paws in the air, as they are able to lose heat through the soles of their feet. Polar Bears are wonderful swimmers. They use their huge paws, the size of dinner plates, to paddle through water at speeds of up to six miles an hour. Their back legs work as rudders. They have been found swimming up to 100 miles from land. Polar Bears eat seal and walrus, but can also eat beluga whales and narwhals. They have a unique digestion, because they seldom drink, so usually feast on the fat of the animal and leave the meat for scavengers. While females make dens, scraped out from ice on south-facing slopes, the males are nomadic, roaming for hundreds of miles. The females give birth to tiny cubs between November and January, and the cubs grow in the den, emerging into their white, cold world in March and April.





American Black Bear

American Black Bears come in many different colours, black, cinnamon, honey, blue and even white. The bears can be found from the Pacific to the Atlantic coasts, from Canada to Mexico. White Black Bears are also known as Spirit Bears or Kermode bears. Black Bears are the smallest of the three bear species found in northern America. They are also thought to be the cleverest. There are about 600,000 Black Bears in northern America. Most Black Bears will hibernate in dens found in hollowed trees or forest caves. When bears hibernate they feed on the body fat they have built up over the summer when food was plentiful. Black Bears are omnivorous. They eat nuts and berries, fruit and insects, honey, deer, fish, grasses, sandwiches from campers when they can find them, and carrion.

Sun Bear

Smallest of all the bears, the Sun Bear is about the same size as a large dog. It gets its name from the golden crescent it wears on its chest. Sun Bears live in the forests of Asia. With long claws and bowed legs, they are as happy climbing trees as on the ground. Sun Bears are fierce. Despite their small size their teeth are as long as the teeth of a tiger. Sun Bears sleep through the heat of the day, high up in treetops. The translation of their name in Malaysian, *beruang matahari*, is "he who likes to sit high". Sun Bears have really long tongues which they use for licking termites from logs and honey from bee hives. The Sun Bears' skin looks as if it is too big for them. Their expressive faces often have wrinkles and frowns. If grabbed by a predator, they can turn and twist to attack with sharp claws, inside their loose-fitting skin.



Let me tell you something –
something about a bear.

