

RARE OREGON ANIMALS

BEAR

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By R. Bruce Horsfall

"I TOLD you 'twan't my bear-fight," said the old-timer when the tender-foot returned after his first experience with a black bear, for the bear was a mother with cubs, and the experienced man leaves such bears strictly alone unless he has an adequate supply of firearms. A mother bear, if she thinks her cubs are in danger, will fight savagely, though a blow from her good forearm is all that any enemy needs. The "bear-hug" so often used in speech has no foundation in fact. However, if a bear is given a fair chance she will leave you entirely alone. As an illustration in point, John Lee likes to tell of an experience which he and a fellow Mazama had while on a hike. The two men suddenly discovered a mother bear and two cubs in a berry patch not over 40 feet distant. Mother bear immediately signaled her babies to scamper up the hill toward the trees and safety, while she calmly awaited the next move by the men; as there was none, because both men knew enough to stand perfectly still, she ambled off after her cubs.

A. G. Jackson of the United States forest service had quite another experience. As he was walking quietly along a forest path he saw a mother bear and one cub, just across the creek, scratching an old log to pieces to get the California termites in its heart. Not deeming himself in any danger, he stood watching her until she spied him. Then she gave one "woof" and rushed across a fallen log toward Jackson, who, of course, prudently retreated a short distance. Mother Bear came no farther than the tree under which he had been standing, and the secret was revealed. Away up in the branches was another cub. Black bears are quite like humans, they thoroughly enjoy a joke on another bear

and rarely resent one on themselves; but you never can tell from their expressions of what they are thinking. We are accustomed to think of them as pugnacious, but they are much more likely to be friendly.

I remember one fine old fellow that made my hair stand on end for a time. It happened while we were photographing bears in the Yellowstone; I had previously fed sugar to a mother bear or two that the hotel people had told us were not to be depended upon for temper, and had not felt the least bit nervous. But this time we had gone to the dump behind the hotel and were getting pictures of the bears at their dinner, when a most superb specimen appeared. His coat was six or eight inches long, and a silky, glossy black. I have never seen a finer bear. Instead of going over and feeding with the other bears he deliberately walked over toward a woman on-looker, who, of course, did not like it one bit and backed away. Then I tried to shoo him off and succeeded in turning him aside by throwing a piece of biscuit ahead of him. After awhile we went round to where he was lying in the tall grass. It was planned that I was to try to feed him from my hand while he had his picture taken, but when that enormous head rose toward my piece of biscuit—rose as high as my shoulder without the bear getting on his feet—I believe that every hair on my head stood up like the quills on the back of a mad porcupine, and the piece of biscuit dropped to the grass. Immediately regretting my lack of nerve, I stooped to regain the biscuit, but Bruin couldn't stand for that and fled. We afterward learned that "Old King" was the gentlest pet of them all and seldom ate from the scrapheap, because he was too well fed by his friends in the hotel kitchen.

AS A contrast, let me relate our experience with the grizzlies at this same hotel. Although we had been told that they would not come before dark, we went out early to watch for them. When the shadows began to lengthen the black bears drifted away one by one. We moved around so as to be nearer the garbage-dumping ground, and so stood

about 60 feet off, when, at twilight, out from the opposite side of the open space, with piglike grunts, crashed four grizzlies, probably a male, a mother and two cubs. My! what an anxious mother she was. Silver-tips are much more nervous in temperament than the blacks, and this particular mother rushed back and forth, grunting, growling and whooping like a scold of mad bulls. We no longer wondered at the blackies leaving the field to her. This mother's gait was a jumping gallop, "thumpety, thump, thump"; quite different from the black bear's shuffling lope.

THE grizzly, often called silver-tip, is naturally a peaceful, good-natured creature, but very prompt to resent an injury and punish the offender. While we were in the Yellowstone a grizzly came about one of the small shacks after a piece of bacon and was shot at. It returned the following night and killed one of the men; the other man saved himself by sliding off the bed and crawling under it.

One need not fear the grizzly bear when in the Oregon woods, as there was no record of grizzlies ever having lived here until two years ago, when a molar tooth was found on the upper Santiam and given to Vernon Bailey of the United States biological survey.

The jaws of the silver-tip are longer and more powerful than those of the black bear; his body is longer, and straighter along the back, with a knot or hump of hair over the shoulders, called a roach. The claws, from six to 8 inches long, are quite straight, which accounts for their reluctance, one might almost say inability, to climb trees.

Bears are classed as carnivora and, as such, some of them can well be called the largest carnivoras in the world; the Alaskan brown bear weighs around 1500 black about 400. But this classification is on the basis of some skeletal characteristics, rather than from their habits, for they really tend to be herbivorous, though they do use some animal food. Their teeth, except the large canines, resemble our own very strongly; they have grinding molars wholly unlike the molars of the carnivorous cats, which are cut-

ting or shearing teeth. Their herbaceous food consists of succulent roots, grass and berries; for animal food, they scratch out the ants, termites and wood-boring beetles and grubs from half-rotten logs; eating, also, mice and other ground rodents.

Bears begin raising families when they attain three or four years of age. Generally there are two cubs at a time, born in winter quarters, in March or about the first of April. They are not much larger than pine squirrels, are not weaned until fall and usually spend the winter and the following summer with the mother. Thus the average mother bear takes two years to rear her cubs.

West of the Cascades in Oregon the bears do not "hole up" for the winter to hibernate, but sleep away only the most inclement weather, in some snug retreat. They have a most amusing habit of singing themselves to sleep while sucking their thumbs, the ear of a comrade, or anything that is handy. Age seemingly makes no difference in this habit, and while they are sucking they make a humming sound like a hive of bees. I've seen this when the mouth was all frothy as if the bear were dreaming of a honey-comb in the forest and was, in memory, licking the stickiness off his fingers. They will follow the scent of honey for miles, they are so fond of its sweet.

I once watched a northern black bear put her two little brown twins to rest. I use the word rest advisedly, because they climbed a tree to go to bed. The mother had coaxed them to the base of an enormous white oak, but there they stalled, backed away and uttered whining little whimpers, "M-a-a-a," as much as to say, "Oh, Mother, not that tree; that tree is too big." But Mother Blackie was firm. She blew a few times through her nose, then cupped one little fellow into obedience. He began to climb and she aided him with her head and arms as high up on the trunk as she could reach, where he clung to the rough bark, for dear life, until the other was able to join him. Mother Bear then put her arms about the tree just below the youngsters, and thus, alternately being pushed and climbing, they reached a very large limb about 40 feet from the ground. There, huddled against the bole of the

tree, safe from all harm, the two babies contentedly whimpered themselves to sleep.

EVERYBODY likes to watch the captive bears in our parks; their antics are so droll. Cubs boxing and wrestling with each other are up to all kinds of tricks and monkeyshines. No cage is so attractive as theirs. Our children's children ought to be able to enjoy them, too.

Of course, when bears are molesting stock they should be killed, but we have thousands of miles of forest that we hope will never be anything else, and it is there that our wild life ought to be preserved. Anything smaller than Yellowstone park is too small to give protection, so long as they can be shot just over the border. All of our larger animals would wander, at times, beyond the confines of any park like the size of Crater Lake park. I should like to see a strip of forest 70 miles wide and equally as long, in the heart of the Cascade range, where we could go, yes, everybody could go, in the summer months and see wild life unafraid; a place where a gun may not be fired; where deer could come to browse before your camp, bear would nibble the berries from the bushes as one passed along the trail, even a cougar might dose stretched upon a log as he watched you saunter by; but they don't dare, the guns in the hands of a few make them afraid of the man.

Grizzlies have a habit of peeling the bark from trees, taking it off as high up as they can reach. This is done in the spring, when hibernating is over, and some authorities consider it a mark of priority of claim to a certain region. And other bears if they cannot reach the mark, respect the maker's rights and keep away. What happens when the mark can be overreached it is difficult to say.

Black bears do the same thing, only they seem to choose the summer time when the sap is running, and it looks as if they were after the sweet cambium layer. S. N. Leak of Wyoming thus describes such a tree which he had photographed: "When a boy I used to peel the outer rough bark from the tree and eat the inner layer; very tender, juicy and of nice flavor. This was during

June, when the tree was making its first growth of the season. The accompanying photograph shows where the bear, having in some way learned of the nice flavor and excellent eating qualities of this inner growth, has with his teeth and claws peeled off the outer bark. His teeth marks may be seen upon the trunk of the peeled tree, where he has scraped off the inner, tender pine-flavored growth."

A tract of several acres in Yellowstone park was so stripped and mutilated that practically every tree was dead. It was close to a long, marshy bog which bears frequented for mud baths. This bog probably contained some mineral properties recognized by the bears as vermin destroyers.

HORSES as a rule are instinctively afraid of bears, and I had that fact brought home very forcibly one night in California, as we were camped under the Calaveras grove of Sequoias. Our valley horses had never seen a bear in their lives, yet they suddenly became very restless and stamped and snorted, and were with difficulty quieted down again. As we drove out about noon the next day we found, in the dust of the road, the footprints of a bear, and those horses snorted and pranced as long as the bear tracks could be traced.

Bears are supposed to be very plentiful in Oregon, but it is extremely rare to find even a track of one. I was told that on the Netarts hills the cross-cross tracks and tunnels through the salal brush were made by bear and deer, yet a thorough examination failed to uncover any fresh traces of either animal, and it was during the ripe berry season at that. Nowhere but on the Oregon and Washington coast does the salal grow to such superb heights, often 15 feet, and while hillsides are completely covered. Through these tracts are tunnels and open paths. Were they made, as supposed, by bears and deer? And are they the only traces now left in a region once thickly populated? And, like the buffalo trails across the plains, are they to remain long after the animals that made them are gone? Who can tell? I certainly found no recent tracks there.