

Is That So?

By EUGENE BURNS
Ranger-Naturalist

The Kodiak bear is the world's largest flesh-eating mammal, but did you know that many of the lesser bears eat less flesh than the wolf and the fox. And as for the Kodiak, which is nine feet long from tip to tail and weighs upwards of 1600 pounds, grazes like a cow! But then there are many unusual things about bears . . . and a host of popular misconceptions.

Except for the polar bear, bears feed on almost anything that happens to be available — grasses, roots, insects, ants, eggs, mice, fruits, fish and game.

The polar bear, living in the cold northland, seldom dens in for the long winter. Only when, every other year, the female is with cub — and then it is largely a matter of protecting the young.

The popular "bear hug" is a figment of the imagination. In fact, it is highly questionable if a bear could enfold his arms to bring off such a feat. When he attacks, he strikes with his huge paws.

Contrary to popular belief, the bear does not hibernate. To be accurate, he sleeps quite profoundly, but his body temperature drops only a few degrees of freezing when the surrounding air becomes cold.

Despite the mother's huge size, the young are always tiny — born naked, with eyes sealed, during the mother's twilight sleep.

No Help From Father

Despite the happy nursery tales about Papa Bear, Mamma Bear and the three little bears — such joyful bliss does not exist. The father does not help take care of the young; in fact, if they should get in his way he might very likely kill and devour them.

Although the bear and the lithe, swift-footed dog seem



are closely related, in fact some of these are so closely related that they are one and the same, merely being color phases.

Free: By special arrangement with the editors of the Encyclopedia Americana, my panel of judges will award each week to the reader who sends me the best true-life nature adventure, the best nature observation, or the best question on nature and wildlife, a complete 30-volume set of this world-famous reference work in a handsome Sealcraft binding. Each week new submissions will be reconsidered. Sorry I simply can't answer your many friendly letters. Please address your letter to: Is That So? c/o Medford Mail Tribune, Box 575, Sausalito, California.

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