Project funded by LIFE + Natura Programme of the European Commission.

Species: Brown bear

Species code: 1354*

Scientific name: *Ursus arctos arctos (Linnaeus, 1758)*

Popular name: Bear

Taxonomia speciei:
Kingdom: Animal
Phylum: Chordata
Subphylum: Vertebrata
Class: Mamalia
Infraclass: Eutheria
Order: Carnivora
Suprafamily: Canoidea
Family: Ursidae
Subfamilia:Ursinae
Genus: Ursus
Species: *Ursus arctos* (Brown bear)
Subspecies: ***Ursus arctos arctos*** **(Euroasian Brown Bear)**

Morphological description:

The bear is the largest terrestrial carnivore. In Romania, the average weight in adult females is 150 kg and in males 250 kg, but some individuals can reach a maximum weight of 400 kg.

The body of the bear is covered with two types of hair: some longer, the spike, and a base layer, the fluff, made of thick hair. The color of the fur is generally brown and is often darker or even black on the back. The tip of the long hair may be light gray. Some individuals are completely brown, the color of chocolate.

The bears are plantigrade, touching the ground with all their paws. Thus, they leave traces that differ from those left by other species found in our habitats. The phalanges end in long (5-6 cm) and strong claws on the front paws. The bear uses them to dig the ground, logs, anthills, to overturn stones, kill and tear prey. Unlike cats, bears do not have retractable claws.

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Distribution and population size

In Europe, the brown bear is found in 22 countries. Based on existing distribution data and a number of geographical factors, ecological, social and political data, European bears were grouped into 10 populations: Scandinavia, Karelia, Baltic, Carpathians, Dinaric - Pind, Eastern Balkans, Alps, Apennines, Cantabria and Pyrenees.

The total estimated number of brown bears in Europe is about 18,000 individuals (in 2016). Based on national reports and updated population census data, the largest population is the Carpathian population (> 7,000 bears), followed by the Scandinavian population and the population of Dinaric - Pind (> 3400 - 3040 individuals). The other populations are much smaller, ranging from a few hundred (eg Baltic Sea ~ 700, Cantabria ~ 200) to less than a hundred individuals (eg Alps ~ 50 bears).

National population

The size of the brown bear population in Romania was estimated in 2016 to 6050-6640 specimens. The brown bear population in Romania is found mainly in mountainous areas, but can also be found in hilly areas, at altitudes higher than 600 m, along the entire forested area of the Romanian Carpathians. According to official estimates, the highest density is recorded in the central and northeastern area of the Carpathians, in the counties of Covasna, Brașov, Harghita, Bistrița, Buzău, Mureș and Neamț.

Habitat

Bears are found in forest areas with generally low human density. They survive best in the mixed hill and mountain forests, of large extent, little disturbed by human activities, which provide shelter, peace and food. Seasonal movements of bear specimens are influenced by existing food sources, sometimes traveling hundreds of miles in search of a rich food resource.

To meet the requirements of a bear, a habitat must include different types of forest, the essential role of the hardwood trees that produce large seeds (beech, oak). Food can be quite abundant in open habitats (meadows, pastures, etc.), but bears prefer to take shelter in nearby forests during the day. The presence of thicket is also important for shelter and feeding. The survival of the brown bear in the wild is not only determined by food. Peace and shelter in the habitat are extremely important for newborn cubs in winter in the den. The den is arranged in natural cavities, felled trees, under rocks, etc., in isolated areas. The location of the dens is often associated with isolated and undisturbed areas. Any disturbance during winter sleep can cause bears to abandon their dens.

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Feeding

The bear has an omnivorous diet that generally consists of plant food and insects, but also consumes other animals.

Vegetable food - depending on the season and area consume: green plants (grass, buds, etc.), berries (strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, bark, horns, forest apples and pears), acorns, beach nut, chestnuts, hazelnuts, mushrooms. In addition to the plant food it finds in its natural area, the bear also feeds on: wheat, oats, corn, fruits (plums, apples, pears, cherries, etc.).
Insects: ants (larvae), bees and wasps (larvae and honey)

Animals: Among the domestic animals, the bear attacks to feed on, most often sheep and occasionally: pigs, cows, donkeys and horses. To feed on other wild animals, it attacks only what is able to catch (young, injured or sick animals), or consume found carcasses of animals, or carcasses taken from other predators.

The bear's omnivorous diet is reflected in its dentition. The brown bear has strong canines that are used in defense, prey killing, carcass dismemberment, and small premolars and postcarneal molars that have large areas of contact are associated with a diet consisting mainly of plant food and invertebrates. Bears are not efficient hunters of adult wildlife unless they are favored by special situations. Although their appearance is that of a carnivore, bears satisfy up to 85% of their required diet from non-animal sources.

Before winter sleep, bears intensify their feeding to create a thick layer of fat from which to survive in the den until spring. Due to the reduced source of food over the winter, they have very little energy in the spring and consume the most easily accessible food.

Shelter

Bears prefer to take shelter in areas of shrubs, bushes with abundant vegetation.
In the cold season, most bears retreat to dens. Their location is often chosen in isolated and undisturbed areas by people. The den is dug into the ground or is arranged in natural cavities, under rocks, between the roots of large trees, etc.
Inside a den, a bear prepares a comfortable bed, using dry grass, leaves or roots.

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Winter sleep

To adapt to reduced feeding conditions and protect themselves from the cold, some bears enter the den for winter sleep. Sleep duration varies depending on weather conditions, food availability and reproductive status. Some bears can stay active all year round without retiring to the winter sleep. For pregnant females, retreat to the den during the winter is a necessity to give birth to the cubs and protect them from the cold.

Winter sleep is often confused with hibernation. Hibernation is a state of inactivity and drastic decrease in the functions of an animal's body, which survives in a deep sleep.
The bear enters the den for winter sleep to conserve his energy if it is quite cold and snowy and has no food source, does NOT hibernate.

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