
Spring Has Arrived And It IS Time To Get Down To Business! Mating Season Is Here!

Mating usually occurs in the spring, however, some fall mating has also been observed. This is one of the few times we get to see the mature males.

Males do not like being viewed so they keep to the forest edges and only come out when enticed to do so by the female.

It is almost like clock work, when the end of June arrives it seems to also be the end of mating season.

A male and female will court for a few days and this is usually the only time boars and sows are seen together. After mating season is finished the elusive males disappear into the forest.

For the remainder of the year bears are solitary creatures and are seen by themselves or in a family unit (a mom with her cubs or siblings on their own).



How Often Do Bears Reproduce?

Bears reproduce at different frequencies depending on the species. A grizzly bear has the lowest reproductive rate of any mammal in North America.

Female grizzlies will have a litter of cubs once every four years. Whereas, a black bear will have a litter every three years. This difference is because the black bear pushes her cubs off in their second year and a grizzly bear will push her cubs off in their third summer.

Bears can have cubs at a shorter interval if she loses her cubs during the year, then she will mate the following spring.

What Is the Gestation Period Of A Bear?

How long is the gestation period of a bear? This is a very good question. Mating occurs in the spring and the cubs are born in January or February the following winter. Bears have a series of survival mechanisms in place and one of them is called “delayed implantation”.

Delayed implantation is a process where the egg is fertilized, the embryo divides about 8 times and then this blastocyst floats around in the uterus for many months until sometime in the fall when the female bear has put on enough weight to sustain herself and the cubs through hibernation.

When the lipids in the bear’s blood stream is at a sufficient level a hormone is released triggering the embryo to implant into the uterine wall, sometime in the late fall (October/November) the cubs are then born two to three months.

Survival Secrets of Grizzly Bears and Black Bears!

Fact Sheet #5

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What is Induced Ovulation?

A female bears reproductive system is different let’s say to a human’s reproductive system. We, as humans have “reflex ovulation” where an egg drops automatically every month. A bear however, has “induced ovulation”, this means a female is induced to ovulate by repeated mountings from a male.

The act of mounting forces an egg to drop allowing it to be fertilized. The function of induced ovulation allows the female to mate with several males during one breeding season. This increases the chance of survival and the mixing of the gene pool.

One of the females that I have had the opportunity to observe over the last several years has been caught on camera with as many as six males over a eight week breeding season. This means that a litter of cubs could have different fathers.

If a female bear loses her cubs during the year, then she will mate the following spring.

Mom Bears And Their Cubs Have A Special Relationship That Can Last For Several Years!



When Are Cubs Born?

Cubs are born in the den while the Mom bear is hibernating Sometime in January or February.

When they are born they are about the size of a pound of butter. Compared to the size of a bear and a human, bears give birth to babies the size of walnuts and humans the size of basketballs.

They are hairless and blind, however, as soon as they are born they begin to nurse on their mother's rich milk, which has approximately 700 calories per litre.

The cubs grow very quickly so much so that by the time they are ready to leave the den in March or April they have gained over twenty pounds and by the time they have gained another sixty-nine pounds.

Can you imagine our own children weighing eighty-nine pounds before they are one year old.

How Long Do Cubs Stay With Their Mom!

Cubs stay with their Mom between one in a half years to two in a half years depending on the species of bear. Black Bears keep their cubs with them for only a year and half or until they are seventeen months old. They are then pushed off in the spring on their second year and the female black bear will mate and have another litter of cubs the following winter.

The grizzly bear on the other hand is a little different. They will keep their cubs until they are two in a half years old or until their third spring. After the female grizzly pushes off her cubs she is ready to mate once again and will then have a litter the following winter. It is the first and third years of a bear cub that is very difficult. That is why only approximately half of all cubs born will live long enough to have cubs of their own.

Keeping the cubs for one more year compared to that of a black bear makes the grizzly bear have the lowest reproduction rate of any mammal in North America.

How Long Do Cubs Nurse!

Bear cubs nurse throughout their first summer. I have observed bears nursing their cubs once every four hours. I figured that the cubs must continue nursing throughout their second winter in the den. They are still so small, how can they survive without nursing?

My question was answered the next spring when I saw a mom bear nursing her yearlings. Then I was asked when do they stop nursing.

I wasn't sure about that either. Nothing was written in the bear books that I could find until once again my question was answered.

I saw a Mom bear nursing her two year olds, almost up to the day she pushed them off so she could mate once more.

When the cubs are older they don't nurse that often. Perhaps once or twice a day or for comfort.

