

Spring Beckons Mother and Cubs from Birth Den

Indians of the Winnebago Bear Clan named January's first moon the bear moon — the time when cubs are born

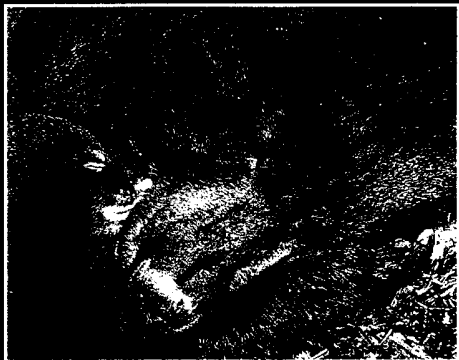


Above: Entrance to black bear den in excavated depression under fallen trees. **Right:** Mother black bear and three-month-old cub emerge from den in Superior National Forest in early April. Cub weighs 4–7 pounds. All photos pages 32–35 by Lynn Rogers, wildlife biologist, USDA Forest Service, St. Paul.

In mid-winter, new life comes to the frozen north woods. Halfway through her six-month winter hibernation, a black bear gives birth to cubs. Each hairless cub weighs one-half to one pound. The den is only slightly warmer than the bitterly cold air outside. To keep her nursing cubs warm, the mother breathes on them as they nestle against a bare spot on her stomach. □ The cubs' fur starts to grow immediately. In late March or early April, mother and cubs venture out of their lair. They grow fat eating wild berries, hazelnuts, and acorns. A keen sense of smell leads them to rotten logs teeming with ants that add protein to their diet. □ As fall approaches, food becomes scarce, temperatures drop, and the mother hunts for a new den. □ By late September, some bears in northern Minnesota begin slumbering again. As winter settles in, their sleep deepens. Heartbeats may slow to eight per minute. □ When winter melts into another spring, bears leave their dens. In June, the 1½-year-old cubs leave their mother and the female mates. Come January, the cycle of new life begins again. □



Birth Den



Black Bear Awakens as Snow Melts and Weather Warms

Right: Black bear licks her cub to clean it and stimulate defecation. When spring arrives, she and cubs remain in their den for few days before moving to snow-free ground. How bears time their denning and emergence remains a mystery.

Top, left: Cub snuggles up to mother who sleeps until temperatures warm and food and water sources reappear in spring.

Middle: Two alert cubs and slumbering mother on nest of leaves, grass, and tree bark. Cedar tree bark makes premier bedding because it does not break apart and decompose easily.

Bottom: Four-month-old cub plays with mother. Curious cubs learn by doing, not entirely by instinct. They remain with mother for almost 18 months. Black bears have one to four offspring every two years.

