

PROJEKT ŽIVOTNOVNE
KULturne



VISITING THE BEAR

Photo: Marko Masterl



SHARING NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Bear is the largest carnivore in Europe. Bear is an endangered animal species due to development of infrastructure, urbanisation and, above all, man's return to its natural habitat. In other words, man's space interventions are a constant threat to bears' natural environment.

People, as farmers or visitors of the forest, and the bear share the same areas of activity, yet the bear needs a quiet and natural environment. Man has entered the bear's habitat, therefore it is man who can help in its preservation - with preserving the bear we would ensure a common space for future generations as well. And we can do this only with treating the environment with respect.

BEARS IN SLOVENIA

Brown bear was very common in Slovenia until the 18th century. But, reductions in forest area, intensive agricultural use, extensive hunting and systematic encroachments in all three large predatory species have drastically reduced its population. Bear's habitat was most narrowed down in flat areas convenient for agriculture use.

In the beginning of the previous century only 30 to 40 bears lived in Slovenia. It was only in the second half of the previous century that the number of bears started to increase due to environmental management and orientation. It is estimated that today **450 to 550 brown bears live in Slovenia.**



Photo: Marko Masterl

WHERE DO WE ENCOUNTER BEARS?

In Slovenia, brown bear can be most frequently found in **fir and beech forests of higher karst** at an altitude from 400 to 1200 meters. In Slovenia the **Dinaric population is the westernmost part of brown bear habitat in Central Europe.** The largest Slovenian population of brown bear is found in the area where transit to Croatia and Dinaric mountains is possible.

In 3000 km² of dense forest of the higher karst bear population survived due to appropriate natural environment and man's sympathy for this species. Though the possibility of encountering a bear in any wooded part of Slovenia cannot be done away with, these chances are relatively small. Slovenia's territory is the bear's core habitat; from here it is travelling the ancient routes in different directions. In the last decade **bear migrations towards northwest**, in the direction **towards the Alps**, are becoming more and more pronounced.

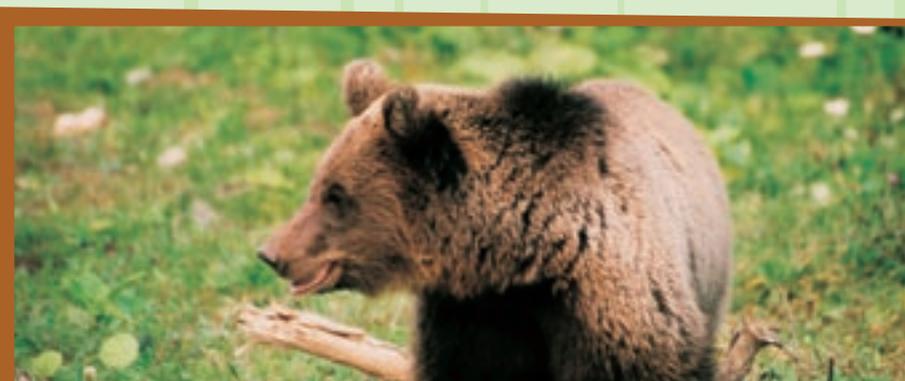


Photo: Marjeta Marinčič

WHEN CAN WE ENCOUNTER A BEAR?

In Slovenia, one can encounter a bear **all over the year.** Even during winter, the bear often "wakes up" from his hibernation and seeks food. Thus, one can encounter a bear **even during winter**, in deep snow and severe cold.



Photo: Marko Masterl

WHO IS A DANGER TO WHOM?



The bear does not see humans as potential prey, so it never stalks on people with an intention or hunt them.

Bear's senses of smell and hearing are exceptionally well developed, though its eyesight is relatively poor. It is extremely difficult to surprise it or approach it unnoticed.

A he bear, or a she bear with cubs, would attack a human being only when they would feel to be in grave danger. Therefore, it is advisable that, in case of encountering a bear - particularly a she bear, man does not act aggressively. Sudden and jerky movements are interpreted by bears as signals for attack.

Certain expert opinions hold that there are much bigger chances of being hit by lightning as being attacked by the bear. Nevertheless, it is vital that this possibility be taken into consideration and to **act properly** in an encounter with a bear. Even the smallest possibilities of an attack will thus be eliminated.

In an encounter with a human being the bear feels, above all, threatened and tends to withdraw from the situation as soon as possible. Let us say, that in their encounter the man and the bear feel the same.

HABITAT AND FOOD HABITS

Brown bear or *Ursus arctos*:

- is not very territorial: the habitat of female bear stretches over 100 km², the males' several times more;
- is omnivorous: plant food amounts from 70 to 85 percent of the diet, meat merely 15 to 30 percent throughout the year;
- hunts only occasionally;
- its diet depends on food available during different seasons

HOW TO BEHAVE IF WE DO NOT WISH TO ENCOUNTER A BEAR?

The bear can smell a human being from a **large distance** and withdraws. We can warn the bear of our presence by making **noise**, especially when the wind is blowing in the direction from which we are coming from. We can alert it with **heavy steps**. We walk so that the leaves underneath our feet whoosh, dry branches crack and the stones chime. It is also advisable to kick a stone, or bang a tree with a walking stick, cough aloud, and even whistle or sing a song. With these things in mind we have, no doubt, done all the necessary for **"informing" the bear about our presence** in time. The bear, as well as the she bear with her cubs, will withdraw from such noise as soon as possible, and the actual encounter will never take place.



Photo: Marko Masterl

Alerting the bear about our presence is highly recommended when crossing areas where the bear is likely to wander. The likelihood of encountering a bear is much bigger on crossing wooded areas with thick bushes or staying in the woods at dusk or night. Another handy "signalling device" besides producing noise is a **strong flashlight** with which the light can be directed at a greater distance.



Photo: Marko Masterl



HOW TO BEHAVE IF WE ENCOUNTER A BEAR?

If we encounter a bear, or a she-bear with cubs, it is vital to **keep calm and remain clear-headed**.

It is most fitting to stand absolutely still or to back away very slowly. Above all, do not panic! We must not forget that **we are dealing with a being which is not aggressive**, unless it feels threatened. Therefore, we must not provoke its attack with inappropriate behaviour. However, we should constantly bear in mind that we are dealing with an extremely strong animal, which can jump over several metres and can run up to 50 kilometres per hour. Even the fastest runner is **easily caught by the bear on flat or sloping terrain**, so a sudden run away is meaningless.



Photo: Marko Masterl

These are serious enough reasons to behave in a way not to provoke the bear into attack.

The bear does not see man potential prey; on the contrary, it sees man as a stronger rival. Thus, it is man who should not provoke the bear to attack.

REPRODUCTION

Brown bear or *Ursus arctos*

- reaches sexual maturity between three and five years of age mates from mid-April to August;
- pregnancy of female bear lasts from seven to nine months: in the den the female bear bears one to three cubs during hibernation;
- young bears stay with their mother for a long time;
- female bear bears young ones every second year.

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED...?

ARE THERE TOO MANY BEARS IN SLOVENIA?

Bears need quiet areas where they can rest and find their peace. The habitat of the brown bear thus consists of unfrequented areas, separated by larger areas which are used only for purposes of migration or of seeking food. Recent studies about the species have shown a **surprising ability of the bear to adjust even in the areas with concentrated human activities**.

Slovenia is one of the few European countries where the population of the brown bear still manages to survive in nature. **Brown bear is a threatened and protected animal species**. It can be preserved only with our knowledge about the species and respect for its natural environment.

IS THERE ENOUGH FOOD IN FORESTS FOR ALL THE BEARS?

No doubt, there is enough food for the brown bear in our forests. **Namely, bears are exceptionally finicky eaters**. They seek the tastiest food, and try to find it as effortless as possible. They eat a variety of different foods; mostly vegetation and insects. While trying to access food without too much effort, they sometimes also wander in the proximity of man.

ARE WE SUPPOSED TO BE FRIGHTENED OF BEARS?

The bear lives in densely populated areas, like Slovenia, as well (96 inhabitants per square kilometre). Fear of the bear is probably caused by its magnificent and impressive appearance. **The presence of a physically superior being is unpleasing for man**, who "rules" his surroundings undisturbed.

Nevertheless, we should bear in mind that the bear is a wild animal, so it is best not to become too trusting of it. In other words, **there is no need to fear the bear, though the right amount of respect should be retained**. It is also true that the more we know of the bear the less we fear it.

VISITING THE BEAR

Respectful and sensible behaviour in the bear's natural environment and knowledge about this animal can aid to its preservation and understanding.

- **Do not follow the trail of bear**, as the chances for encountering the bear are thus much bigger. Our presence is a disturbing element in his life.
- **Do not look for bear with an intention** of observing or photographing it. The forest is its home, so show respect for its need for quiet homely environment.
- **Do not leave food leftovers out in the open** in the area of bear. Pay attention to the storage of food supplies - when camping or near holiday homes, for example. The bear is an intelligent animal and prefers to access food without too much trouble.
- On returning from day trips and excursions **collect all organic waste**. Do not throw it in waste collectors on the way as it may attract bears. The bear might get used to man's presence and would not fear us anymore.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF BEAR

Brown bear or *Ursus arctos*:

- is the largest European carnivore;
- has tiny eyes, short and round ears, and short tail;
- has well developed sense of smell and hearing, its eyesight is relatively poor;
- in Slovenia specimen weighing over 300 kilos are found rarely; usually weighs between 100 and 150 kilos;
- in nature it reaches the age from 15 to 25 years;
- appears to be clumsy and slow, but is a fast runner, a good swimmer; younger bears are also good climbers;
- is less active from November to March (hibernation);
- is adjustable in the choice of dwelling-space: seeks shelter in caves, behind a fallen tree or underneath trees.



Photo: Marjeta Marinič

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