

WHO ARE WE?

Brown bear or *Ursus arctos* with our Latin name are **the largest European carnivore**. In Slovenia we seek shelter mostly in fir and beech-tree forests of the higher Karst. Since our species is threatened in the long term we are a protected species. In the choice of our dwellings we are not particularly squeamish: caves can become our dens or we find shelter behind a fallen tree or underneath young trees. If we were to describe ourselves, we would say that - besides our brown fur - we are distinctive for our tiny eyes, short round ears and a short tail. Our hearing and sense of smell are exceptional so we can tell immediately if you are in the forest - and since we are more of a secluded nature we prefer to withdraw. Our eyesight is not particularly good, we admit, so from a distance we can see only your silhouette.

We he bears are, of course, much larger than she bears, and stronger too. A grown-up bear can **weigh from 100 to 150 kilos**, only rarely we weigh more than 300 kilos. Our weight varies according to the seasons: in late autumn we are much heavier than in early spring. We he bears also lose a lot of weight during our mating periods. It is said that in captivity we live from 30 to 40 years, in nature less - from 15 to 25 years.

From November to March we are less active because of low temperatures; we hear that people call this **hibernation**. During this time we wake up often and go out of our dens. When there is plenty of food some of us bears stay active for the whole winter and do not sleep at all. Lowered activity is brought about by endocrine glands; bodily temperature is lowered by two degrees. Our bodily temperature is retained by a vivacious digestion which uses the fat obtained during autumn.

Though at a first glance this seems surprising, we bears are also very sports. We can run very fast - even up to 50 kilometres per hour; we are good swimmers as well, and when young, we can climb really well. Because we walk over the whole sole of our foot, you people call us **plantigrades**.

WHAT DO WE EAT?

We bears eat on a daily basis. We are **omnivorous**, though our menu consists mostly of vegetarian diet. Over the year **plant food amounts 70 to 80 percent** of our diet, mainly berries and grasses. Meat amounts to 15 to 30 percent of our diet and consists mostly of small animals and carrion, only occasionally we hunt larger animals for food.

HOW DO WE MATE?

We reach sexual maturity between three and five years; the mating season lasts from mid-April to August. She bears are pregnant from seven to nine months. During the winter hibernation the she bear **bears one to three young ones**, rarely more.

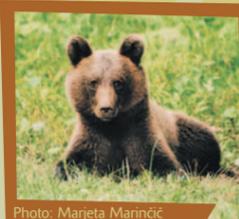


Photo: Marjeta Marincič



Photo: Marko Masterl

OUR HABITAT

We spend most of our time on our own; therefore you people call us **loners**. She bears look after the cubs for at least a year after their birth. We mark our territory, our habitat by scratching tree barks with our claws.

The habitat of she bears **stretches over 100 km²**, while we males occupy a space several times larger depending on food supplies. We are not particularly territorial, so activity spheres often overlap. We live in the forest and its surroundings, and we can walk up to **30 kilometres** per day or night. **Here, in Slovenia, we are more active during the night**, since the chances for encountering humans are fewer in the night. Our presence can be discovered by footprints in soft soil or snow.

Today, we brown bears live usually in fir and beech-tree forests of the higher Slovenian Karst. Here, it is possible to create our habitat because of vast areas of dense forest. In 3000 km² of dense forests of the higher Karst we have survived because of an appropriate environment and because of the sympathy people have for us. It is estimated that there is **from 450 to 550** of us today in Slovenia.



Photo: Marko Masterl

The **Dinaric population** in Slovenia is the westernmost brown bear population in Central Europe. In Austria, for example, there are only 30 to 40 bears. Slovenian population thus presents a great hope for our re-habitation in the Alpine area. In **Western Europe** we can be found scattered over Italy, where our bears were populated after extinction; Slovenian bears were populated in the Pyrenees as well. Some bears can also be found in Spain, while the great majority of brown bears are located near Southern Balkans in Russia, and in Scandinavian countries, where around 14.000 bears live.

COMING FOR A VISIT

We **get a wind of you** from a great distance, and - if only possible - we stay out of your way. Nevertheless, you can call our attention to you, and you walking the forest, with a **noise**, particularly when the wind is blowing in the direction where you are coming from. You can warn us with heavy steps. Walk so that the leaves underneath your feet whoosh, dry branches crack and stones chime. It is also advisable that you kick a stone, or bang a tree with your walking stick, cough aloud, and even whistle or sing a song. Well, there is no need for shouting - the rest of the forest inhabitants may mind! With these things in mind you have, no doubt, done all the necessary for **"informing" us about your presence** in time. Also the she bear and her cubs will withdraw as soon as possible from such noise, so we will not meet for certain.

Nevertheless, if we do meet by any chance, keep calm and quiet. We are frightened as you are. It is best if you stand absolutely still and try to

overcome the dread, if it is getting into you. We bears are not aggressive, unless we feel threatened. Please, do not make sudden and jerky movements; because we interpret it as a signal for attack, it is as if you were shouting out loud. We are strong and fast runners too, so - if we do meet - it is best that we go in our separate ways.

- **Do not follow our trail**, as we get the impression you are following us and this frightens us.
- **Do not look for us** with an intention of observing or photographing us. Forests are our homes. Imagine how would you feel if we came to your home and wanted to take photos of you?
- In the area of the bear **do not leave food leftovers out in the open**. Mind how you store your food - when camping or near holiday homes, for example. We like to take the easy way to get food; particularly our young bears get used to the presence of humans easily and are not afraid of you even when they grow up. And this is not right.
- On your way home from day trips and excursions **collect all organic waste**. Do not throw it in waste collectors on the way as this can attract bears.



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