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Photo of our fund raising thermometer. To make a donation to help build our new visitor center, log on to www.americanbear.org and use the donate button.
In this Issue of Bear In Mind

From The Bears Den by Dennis Udovich ................................................................. 4
Bear Sanctuary by Tom Klein .................................................................................. 6
SayLin Ong…Working for a Better Future By Klari Lea ........................................ 8
One more from the Timberjay by Marshall Helmerberger ................................... 10
Bucklew By Ken Bucklew ...................................................................................... 14
Summary of Scat Stud By Keith Doerfler ............................................................. 18
Become A Member .................................................................................................. 19

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FROM THE BEARS DEN

I would like to pay special thanks to our sanctuary manager, Keith Doerfler. Keith joined our team this past spring and did a great job keeping everything organized on the ground. He worked with our volunteers and interns at a time when we were understaffed and kept everything running smoothly. He’s returning again next year as sanctuary manager. Check out Keith’s article about time he spent here as an intern.

Nancy Glass took on the job as program coordinator this spring. She’s been busy at the office, on the grounds, in the gift store and everywhere else she’s needed. She has taken on the daily running of The American Bear Association and will be the one you’ll be talking with when you call the office. Check out the Timberjay article in this issue about Nancy Glass and her husband, Curt.

To our volunteers and interns, we literally couldn’t run without you. Deepest appreciation for all your hard work this year especially in light of the extremely long hours and exhausting physical work. Your dedication to the bears is what keeps the sanctuary going and I’m hoping you left with a sense of deep satisfaction knowing that you truly made a difference to the bears and to us “old timers” at the sanctuary. You are always welcome back and I know there’s great success in your future endeavors. Check out the photo of our 2012 bear team on page 12 at the end of a hard day.

When I started my 1st term as president of ABA, six years ago, I had three main goals I hoped to accomplish. First was the installation of a handicap lift. Those of you who have visited the sanctuary know the many steps needed to access the main deck. Well, this is now crossed off our list as the lift is complete and ready for use this spring. Second was the acquisition of much needed critical habitat surrounding the sanctuary. Although 200 acres was donated to the sanctuary, we also had to purchased 160 acres when one of the timber company’s put some land up for sale. With the help of a low interest loan from one of our generous supporters we bought the land for $165,000. To keep the bears safe and protect their travel corridors, adjoining land is needed. Your help is needed. If you would like to donate to purchase critical land or help pay down our land debt please visit our website and click on the “donate” button. And lastly my goal of seeing the building of a new educational/visitor center has been put on hold. The monies donated to start this building has only reached 1/3 of what is actually needed. All of these generous donations are sitting in our “building fund”, but at this time my main concern is securing the future for the bears that visit the sanctuary and the way to do this is to acquire surrounding habitat. So as you see, we still have more to do. I hope you will help the bears by giving generously towards our goal.

Thanks,
Dennis Udovich
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BEAR IN MIND

BEAR SANCTUARY

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Tom Klein – Cook-Orr Editor

ORR – For Nancy Glass, becoming pro-
gram coordinator at the Vince Shute Wild-
life Sanctuary seemed like a natural step.
“I have a background in outdoor recre-
ation and did a lot of campwork in my
early years, so I was just thrilled to get
offered the job,” she said. “I couldn’t ask
for a better job.”

Her husband, Curt, also is working at
the center this year, driving bus and as-
sisting with maintenance at the site. One of his current projects is adding a handicapped
access to the viewing deck at the wildlife sanctuary.

Sanctuary’s history

The sanctuary is one of three former logging camps operated by Vince Shute. On the
bus ride into the viewing station, Curt talked about the history of the camp and Vince’s
relationship with bears.

Vince made the best sourdough pancakes around and promised his loggers pancakes
for breakfast every day,” said Curt. But the smell of the pancakes also attracted hungry
black bears.

Vince’s first response was to shoot the bears, but he later regretted his actions. He rea-
soned that the bears weren’t mean, but merely hungry. So he began to put out pancakes
for the bears and they quit breaking into his logging camp buildings, Curt explained.

Curt first visited the sanctuary before the establishment of the American Bear Associa-
tion. When he arrived at the site, he found dozens of black bears wandering the grounds.
Vince was seated in a lawn chair with two huge black bears sitting next to him. “It was a
little intimidating,” Curt recalled.

Dennis Udovich, president of the American Bear Association, noted that the bears trust-
ed Vince so much that they would allow him to pluck ticks from their heads.

As word of Vince’s unique friendship with bears spread, carloads of people began show-
ing up to feed and observe the bears. Concerns about the safety of the people visiting the
site and the fate of the bears once Vince was gone resulted in the formation of the Ameri-
can Bear Association by Karen Hauserman and Bill and Klari Lea.

Although association members acknowledge that feeding wild bears isn’t advisable,
they saw a rare opportunity to observe black bear behavior with animals normally skittish
around humans.
Udovich said the key goal of the association is to educate people about bears. A center that will provide more information on black bears is planned for the future. More than a quarter of the $400,000 to build the center has been raised through donations and fund-raisers already, according to Udovich.

The sanctuary also added a viewing platform for visitors. “Here we cage the people and the bears go free,” joked Curt Glass. In addition, bears no longer dine on marshmallows or treats. Volunteers supply the bruins with natural foods left at feeding stations on the sanctuary grounds.

**World-renowned**

The sanctuary is known across the globe as one of the premiere locations to view black bears. Nancy Glass said she recently spoke with a couple from Australia who were on their first visit to the United States and cited the sanctuary as one of the reasons for coming to states.

In addition to visitors, sanctuary volunteers come from around the world. Although the majority of volunteers this year are from the United Kingdom, Nancy said volunteers in the past have come from Sweden, Scotland, Greece and a variety of other countries.

As program coordinator, Nancy oversees various workshops, including several photo workshops, at the sanctuary. She also assists with office work, helps out at the gift shop and helps meet and greet visitors to the sanctuary.

One of the best parts of the job is encountering the visitors. “You meet a lot of different people,” she said. “I stay in touch with quite a few of them through email.”

Nancy also takes her turn on the grounds, leaving food at stations for the bears. She said walking among the bears wasn’t a difficult adjustment. “I’ve always had wild animals as pets when I was a kid,” she said, and she also compared some of the bear behaviors to the behavior of sled dogs that she used to own.

Even so, she said she keeps alert to indications when she’s encroaching on bears. Bears will bluff charge — pawing the ground and snorting — if someone gets too close to them. “It’s just their way of communicating,” said Glass.

Visitation numbers have been comparable to past years. But the stifling heat is taking a toll on bears, who seek refuge in the woods or streams from the heat. Still, the center is a hotbed for bear activity each summer, with some — such as Schwinn the three-legged bear — making annual appearances like clockwork.

Curt said some of the distances that bears travel to the sanctuary are astonishing. One bear, equipped with a radio collar, traveled 250 miles from Sandstone to the sanctuary, he said.

Meanwhile, the Glasses are enjoying their new jobs at the sanctuary.

“Every day you come to work, you’re just excited,” said Nancy. “It’s just so neat to observe the bears in their natural behavior; it never gets old.”
We often refer to our volunteers and interns as our “seeds of hope”. .. Why?? Well mainly because they dedicate themselves so unselfishly to ABA’s mission of education in promoting peaceful co-existence for humans and bears. In addition, they do this in the most challenging of conditions. Surviving our summers at the Sanctuary means enduring long days of grueling chores, hoards of biting insects, extremes of temperatures, and sometimes volatile weather… all of this without the convenience of electricity or running water. It is not for the faint of heart. In spite of the obstacles, these special volunteers keep focused on their primary objective: making a difference on behalf of bears and people. They are accomplished visionaries, who not only talk the talk, but walk the walk…and often, at great sacrifice of their own needs or comforts. We, at the Vince Shute Wildlife Sanctuary, are proud to meet and work with these dedicated and conscientious people. I, personally, would like to think that their labor-intensive yet meaningful time at the Sanctuary has contributed in some small way to their courage and spirit exhibited in subsequent endeavors.

Since the birth of The American Bear Association in 1995, we have learned about outstanding achievements made by several of these exceptional volunteers, in their lives after leaving the Vince Shute Wildlife Sanctuary. SayLin Ong from Singapore is one such example. SayLin came last summer, 2011, as an intern for 2 weeks. Everyone immediately found him most likable and enjoyed listening to his vast experiences of employment in a variety of exotic locations. SayLin seemed to thrive from the daily lessons learned from working among the incredible black bears at the Vince Shute Wildlife Sanctuary. He always asked a lot of questions and enthusiastically embraced every “teachable moment”.

Recently, SayLin was hired as Executive Director of ACRES Bear and Wildlife Rescue Center in Laos, an initiative by ACRES Singapore, an animal welfare NGO. Fresh out of college, this young man impressed officials to the point that he was assigned the critical responsibility of directing a rescue centre meant for providing relief to those bears released from their horrendous lives on the many illegal bile-collecting farms. Bear bile farms are places where Asiatic Black Bears, also known as Moon Bears, are locked up after being caught from the wild. They suffer unspeakable daily torture living in coffin-like cages that restrict their movements. They have metal tubes implanted into their bodies to facilitate the cruel harvesting of bile fluids destined for the lucrative black market. ACRES aims to rescue these suffering and seriously impaired bears and transfer them to the rescue center where they will eventually be able to live a free life as close to nature as possible in the 5 hectare compound. Thankfully, this allows the bears to live out the rest of their lives as “real bears” in a semi-natural environment designed to provide nurturing and enrichment. Suitable bears fit enough for release will even be reintroduced back into the wild and their progress closely monitored!
SayLin’s journey will definitely not be an easy one. We have no doubt that with his proven commitment to make it a better world for bears that he will valiantly rise to successfully meet the upcoming challenges. At the same time, SayLin plans to pursue his Master’s degree on-line so that someday, he can help make a difference for bears and other wildlife on an even grander scale…and that is EXACTLY WHY SayLin remains another one of our great “seeds of hope”! Good luck, SayLin!

Saylin at a photo exibition in Bangkok Thialand of a bear cub photo taken at the VSWS
You could just hear the excitement in the voices of the couple of dozen early risers who turned out last week for a rare morning visit to the Vince Shute Wildlife Sanctuary, near Nett Lake.

The sanctuary staff call it “Breakfast with the Bears” and it was a first-time experience for most of those who turned out for the two-hour visit, experienced over cups of fresh coffee, rolls, fruit and yogurt.

While breakfast was a plus, the people had come for the chance to see the wild black bears that turn out each day for the smorgasbord of nuts and berries put out by sanctuary staff.

They weren’t disappointed. Dozens of wild black bears roamed the grounds around the sanctuary’s viewing platform. A series of yearling bears took turns playing, as adolescents do, in the limbs of a big elm tree that grows just a little over an arm’s length from the sanctuary’s viewing platform.

“This is awesome!” was a common refrain from the morning’s visitors, as they snapped photos and pointed to the latest antics of yet another bear spotted in a tree or on the ground nearby.

It was impossible not to agree.

It had been quite a few years since I’d visited the sanctuary, and I was impressed by what this nonprofit group, the American Bear Association, has been able to achieve over the years on its shoestring budget. As a place to see wild black bears, the sanctuary is unique unto itself, and the staff take their educational mission seriously, for both humans and bears.

As bear association president Dennis Udovich routinely points out to visitors, feeding bears isn’t generally a good idea. But the group had long worried that discontinuing the feeding could create bear problems for the handful of neighbors in the area. Udovich said he’s convinced that the diversionary effect of the sanctuary actually reduces nuisance activity by bears outside the sanctuary. As Vince Shute himself often pointed out, the bears aren’t mean, they’re just hungry. When they’re fed, they have little reason to get into your garbage.
Besides, the educational potential of the site is amazing, and sanctuary staff do a good job of pointing out bear life cycles and behavior. It’s a place that helps dispel the myths built up by media portrayals over the years of black bears as vicious creatures that humans should invariably fear. Like just about everything, the real story is considerably more complicated than the stereotype.

But while the feeding operation inevitably habituates bears to people, the staff there work to teach their bear visitors a thing or two as well. In the feeding area, they teach the bears that humans can be trusted. But outside that small zone, they do their best to teach the bears otherwise, by sounding horns and frightening bears away when they show up on the sanctuary’s access road, or other areas outside the feeding area. They want the bears to understand that outside the safe zone, regular rules about human and bear interactions apply. Udovich sees it as an obligation they have to be sure bears aren’t endangered by the sanctuary’s work.

So far, he said, the bears seem to be getting the message, although its required the sanctuary staff to be strict about not feeding or stopping to look at bears outside the feeding zone.

If you’d like to visit the Vince Shute bear sanctuary, it’s located about 12 miles west of Orr on Hwy. 23. It’s normally open to visitors from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m., Tuesday through Sunday. Sept. 2 is the final day of their season, so you’d better hurry if you want to visit with the bears this year.

You could also visit the sanctuary’s website at americanbear.org for more information. While you’re there, consider a donation to help fund the group’s efforts. They spend more than $40,000 a year on bear food alone, not to mention all of the other expenses of operating this exceptional place. It’s well worth your support.
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Left to right Greg & Keith Sanctuary Managers. Interns Lauren, Alyssa, Kaitlyn, Jenny.

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A special donation of $1250 was made by Richard Fischer in memory of his wife, Barbara.

Thank you Fiona & Lilypadders for your continued support and donation of $367.00

Thank you John Schranz & Don Galusha for your craftmanship in building the on deck displays.

DONATIONS NEEDED

To help secure the future of the sanctuary, donations are needed for the purchase of critical habitat. Lands that are major wildlife travel corridors and bear habitat need to be acquired for the security of the bears that frequent the sanctuary. Some of these properties have already been logged off and some are being leased and could be sold at any time. We need your help to fund these major acquisitions as they become available for the safety of the bears that visit the sanctuary. Remember the American Bear Association is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and your donation is deductible to the full extent of the law. We will provide you with a document for your tax records.
VISIT THE ORR

By Ken Bucklew

Five years ago, at midnight on July 4th, we left my house for an all night drive to Orr, Minnesota where we would spend the night before heading on up to Kenora, Ontario the next day to fly into a remote fishing camp at Rowdy Lake. I fell onto the bed in the motel room, exhausted from the long drive, when my buddy Brent threw a brochure on my bed and said “Hey Ken, you outta go check out these bears.” That was my introduction to the Vince Shute Wildlife Sanctuary and I found a little energy and said “Let’s go.”

I had never seen a wild black bear. Growing up in the beautiful Southern Indiana woodlands of Owen County, I knew that black bears had been gone here since the mid 1800’s. Since very young, I was marked as having an intimacy with the wild things and wild places that would be a life long inspiration to the art I would become known for. While ginseng digging or mushroom hunting I would often imagine how great it would be to see some of the long gone native species back in place such as the passenger pigeon, American chestnut tree and the black bear.

I came to love the Minnesota woods on summer vacations with friends in the early 70’s while in high school. We stayed on Ten Mile Lake down in Cass County and mostly fished and swam a lot. But every chance I could, I would hop on my 15 Suzuki Duster and disappear down Wood Tick Trail with my camera to explore and hopefully catch a glimpse of a bear. I would see signs but they would always elude me. The others I was with kind of thought I was crazy but I would always return to the cabin having not been eaten by bears but rather ticks, mosquitos, and deer flies. I ate a lot of red raspberries and would come away with sightings of beavers, birds, banded purples and other things that always made each venture worth it.

In July 1975, just after high school graduation, my own carelessness nearly resulted in my own demise at Ten Mile Lake as I dove into shallow water and sustained a severe spinal cord injury resulting in paralysis from the neck down. I would now spend over four months in the hospital trying to survive and rehab my way back as best as possible. I had severely bruised my spinal cord in my neck and would be physically
limited from then on and would only return to Minnesota a few times in the next twenty years or so.

With a lack of sensation and dexterity in my hands and fingers I worked on restoring my art ability and went on to college, graduated and got a job as an illustrator for an advertising agency. While working there I began making good connections with various publishing companies on the side to do freelance art for greeting cards, calendars, educational products, magazine articles, stamps, etc. The subject matter of most of the freelance work was nature and wildlife. I soon left the agency and plunged into a career painting nature that has been very rewarding and satisfying. The artwork I was doing, since it was going to published, had to be done from first hand reference material such as my own photography, specimens, and experiences composed to make everything original. So I was always searching, photographing, and gaining knowledge of my subject matter that was essential to doing it well.

I have only done a few pieces of art in my life depicting black bears because they are not around here anymore and getting first hand reference material was difficult. The drawing shown here was done from photographs taken last summer of a yearling here at the refuge that had been chased up a tree. The downy woodpecker wasn’t there at the time but I added it to focus his attention on something. There will be more. So thanks Vince and all of the volunteers for the opportunity to see the bears. See you next summer.
ON JULY 6, SCHWINN THE THREE LEGGED BLACK BEAR RETURNS. THIS IS HIS 13TH YEAR

by Rhonda Schrade

This bear has become quite popular with all the locals and visitors of the sanctuary from around the world. Many people call and email the sanctuary inquiring if Schwinn has returned for the season. He originally received his name from the reference to the Schwinn tricycle.

It is not known how the three-legged bear lost his leg, but there are many theories. The accident probably happened as an adult because the odds of a cub making it with only three legs are very slim. Schwinn started coming to the sanctuary when he was just 2 years old and has shown up every year for the past 13 years, making him 15 years old.

“Visitors always ask about the three legged bear, if he has come back,” says American Bear Association founder and bear behaviorist Klari Lea, “They are always rooting for him and pulling for him to come back the next season.” Adds Lea, “We’re particularly excited when he returns. He is just an amazing animal and I feel a lot of people can relate to him. He is the easiest bear at the sanctuary to identify.”

The three-legged bear, Schwinn, joins approximately 50 bears that visit the sanctuary. Missing his left front leg has never slowed him down and Schwinn can hold his own with the other bears and has learned to survive in the dominant hierarchy of the wild bears at the sanctuary. He may hobble around when he walks, but can quickly run away when feeling threatened.

Currently, the sanctuary does not know how far Schwinn travels or where he goes to hibernate. In this case, the sanctuary would like to put out a request to the public and ask anyone who spots Schwinn to call the sanctuary and report a sighting.
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first came to the Vince Shute Wildlife Sanctuary in the summer of 2007 as an intern from Sterling College, a small environmentally focused school in northern Vermont. Prior to being accepted for this internship I struggled as I searched every wildlife job board I could find, in order to find an internship that I either qualified for or was at least remotely interested in. Finally one evening as I was scrolling through the Sterling College internship data base the word “Bears” caught my eye. This excited me because ever since I was a small boy I have had a passion for all things Ursine.

I was directed to the American Bear Association website and filled out the online application, quite a difficult task when crossing all fingers in hopeful anticipation!

About a month later I received the email I was waiting for…good news intact. It said something to the effect of, “When can you be here and how long can you stay?”

In the end I was able to be there on June 15th, 007 and stayed for ten weeks; ten of the most intense, educational and rewarding weeks of my life to date. But that is actually another story…

The following school year I was to begin working on my Senior Applied Research Project (SARP), basically an undergraduate version of a “mini” thesis. Reflecting on my wonderful experience the previous summer at VSWS I came to the conclusion that I wanted my SARP to include two things: 1) Bears and 2) VSWS.

I contacted Carolyn Malcolm, then in charge of intern projects at VSWS, for advice on a potential project. She suggested looking into the natural forage of the bears that frequent the sanctuary. Everyone familiar with the sanctuary knows about the supplemental feeding that occurs there, but not much was known, at least to me, about what the bears were eating when not feeding on the bear mix. The idea of learning more about the bears’ natural feeding habits intrigued me and I agreed to focus my project on this topic.

With no prior experience in scatology I packed up a few articles on the subject, my favorite bear-worthy clothing, and my sleeping bag, and drove from Vermont to Minnesota to begin my second adventure at VSWS. For approximately five weeks in 2008, from August through early September I gathered scat samples from throughout the feeding area of the sanctuary, looking through the contents of each sample to see what I could find. The next BIM news letter describes what I found during that time…
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