

BEAR IN MIND

Vol. 18, Issue 2

Fall 2013



Photo Credit: Eric Tetens



Dedicated to promoting a better understanding of the black bear through education, observation and experience.



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.

BEAR IN MIND

Editor—Dennis Udovich
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BEAR IN MIND (BIM) is published three times a year by The American Bear Association™ (ABA), a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting a better understanding of the black bear through education, observation and experience. The ABA also owns and operates the Vince Shute Wildlife Sanctuary in Orr, MN. To become a member or to learn more please contact us at:

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FROM THE BEARS DEN

As I reflect on the past season I am most impressed with the dedicated and hard working volunteers and interns we had again this year. Young men and women from across the U.S. and this year, England too. They come stay with us, some 2 weeks and up to 5 months , and work at many tasks to take care of the bears. Without these volunteers the sanctuary wouldn't be able to survive. Our staff, Nancy, Curt, Jenny and Keith, did a great job recruiting and managing the many projects and daily chores during their stay.

Our late spring, and very wet May and June, affected the public visitor numbers this year. It didn't help that the bear visitors were down also this summer. Due to the bumper crop of natural forage all year (blueberry, juneberry, chokecherry, pincherry, plums, hazelnut, highbush cranberry) the bears had little need to supplement their diets. Our bear food manager, Keith, has quite a juggling act trying to put out just the right amount so that we're helping to supplement and not making the bears dependent on the extra food. He's been doing a great job at it.

A great big thank you to George and Kay Henry. Once a week these two bring in a delicious home cooked meal for the volunteers. They have been doing this for years plus they have a fun day at the lake or plan a side trip to one of our local sites all to entertain our volunteers.

George and Kay...a great big thank you!

We are in the process of moving our office into the town of Orr. The old house that we've been currently using has been sold and we'll be temporarily renting office space and setting up a small gift shop at the old Orr City Hall. This will make a very short walk for Nancy, our program coordinator, the sale of the old house will go into the building fund and get us moving to build our new visitor and education building.

And lastly. The shooting of Lynn Rogers radio collared bears this fall is greatly troubling to me as a hunter. Hunting bears is not illegal, but to specifically target these radio collared bears is highly unethical. The DNR handbook rules on page 95 on bear hunting includes "Hunters are asked not to shoot radio collared bears, with brightly colored streamers or ear tags." Public and private land surrounding our sanctuary is open to hunting. The best way to protect our borders is to purchase adjoining habitat as it becomes available. Any help is greatly appreciated. Next issue: Moose declining at a high rate in Minnesota. The MN DNR is spending over one million dollars to study these iconic animals. Some of the first results will surprise you. Stay tuned.



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I CRIED “WOLF”!

By Nancy Glass

Wolves are thriving again in northern Minnesota. Yet, even as they're helping re-establish the balance of nature, they are also reigniting a fierce controversy. I hope to breach a gap between people who would grant wolves unconditional amnesty and others who would eliminate them. Wolves were here before we were and deserve a place. By gaining a better understanding of wolves, I hope we can learn to co-exist and appreciate northern Minnesota's vast and magnificent wilderness areas.

My Story:

As I have done every winter day after work for the past seven years, I grabbed my snowshoes, called for my yellow lab “Bo”, and jumped in the car to join our group of friends at the upper trailhead to the Gheen Hill Trails just 5 miles south of Orr. Stepping out of the car and inhaling the intoxicating mix of the overabundance of pines and new growth that border our trail was exhilarating! The upper trail follows a ridge west for a little over a mile gradually dropping down and turning north to follow the rim of a black spruce swamp before joining the lower trail. The lower trail winds its way eastward along an old logging cut, through a cedar swamp ending at the lower trailhead on the Diamond Match Logging road.

In the last two years, our group had become more aware of the increasing number of wolves we share our trails with by observing fresh markings, numerous paw prints in the snow, and well-trodden pack trails crossing our snowshoe trail. This winter, 2009, with an increasing number of sightings of recent wolf kills, we kept our dogs leashed. Although we have not sighted a wolf, we felt their presence. Do wolves attack dogs?

Yes. The gray wolf is the ancestor of domestic dogs. Wolves view dogs as territorial threat. Dog owners need to be aware of the possible risk to their dogs if they are in wolf habitat. Hikers should think about leaving their dogs at home when visiting areas with wolves. Hikers should keep their dogs on a leash or closely controlled.

How many wolves are in a pack?

Two or more wolves traveling together can comprise a “pack,” but a pack on average consists of five to 10, including the alpha male and female. The rest of the pack may include pups from the current year and a few offspring from the past year or two that are subordinate to the breeding adults. Packs can be considerably larger in size (up to 20 or more wolves) in regions with abundant prey. How large is one pack's territory? Wolf pack territories vary in size, ranging from less than 100 square miles in Minnesota, to pack territories from about 300 to 1,000 square miles in Alaska and Canada. Each wolf pack has its own territory, an area where it lives, hunts, and raises its offspring. Wolves actively defend their territory against other canids (dog-like animals) including other wolves. Territory size is usually based on the density of prey—more deer or elk in the territory results in wolves traveling less to find food. Territory size is also dependent on the size of the pack and the concentration of other neighboring wolf packs.

What is the life history (life cycle) of the gray wolf?

Gray wolves breed once a year between January and March (normally only the male and female leaders of the pack.) After a 63-day gestation period (length of pregnancy), the mother gives birth to an average of four to six pups in April or May. Wolf pups are born blind and deaf, weighing about one pound. During the first three weeks, while the pups are nursing and need help regulating their body temperatures, the mother stays with them in the den, eating food brought to her by other members of the pack. The pups are weaned at about eight weeks of age after learning to eat more solid food in the form of regurgitated meals from the female or other members of the pack. Growth is rapid, and by the time the pups are 6 months old, they are almost as big as the adults. At this time they are moved to one or more “meeting sites,” where they spend the rest of the summer traveling with the pack and joining in hunts. Fewer than half of wolf pups live to adulthood. Not many wolves in the wild live more than five years. Humans are the largest cause of wolf mortality. Territorial conflicts between packs, injuries from hunting prey, disease and starvation are other common causes of death.

Why do wolves howl?

Howling is the one form of communication used by wolves that is intended for long distance. A defensive howl is used to warn other pack members about danger, and to protect kill sites. A social howl is used to locate one another and for calling the pack together.

Can wolves be habituated to humans?

Wolves tend to avoid human-inhabited areas. However, wolves can lose the fear of humans by having recurrent and increasingly closer interaction with humans, and by receiving food rewards from humans. When wolves become tenacious in their pursuit of food in human-inhabited areas, the wolves can be seen as a conceivable danger to humans and pets - increasing the likelihood of them being killed by wildlife officials.

Habituating wolves is similar to feeding any wild animal. Baiting deer also baits the predators that follow the deer. Putting out birdseed may attract birds, but it also draws mice, snakes, foxes, coyotes, wolves and bears. Feeding animals creates an unnatural density of that species, and when humans are added to the mix, conflicts are bound to occur. The lessons to be learned from these occurrences are:

- Do not feed wild wolves—ever! By feeding wolves, you are rewarding their behavior to return to human inhabited areas. They will learn to view humans as a food source. Do not leave food outdoors, including pet food.
- Do everything you can to avoid habituating wolves to humans. Do not let wolves get close to you; do not let them learn to be at ease in the presence of humans. Wolves become bolder when familiarized to humans. Wolves are very powerful and strong, and should be treated with caution and respect. Wolves are naturally afraid of humans, but may become comfortable with people along popular hiking trails. If a wolf approaches absolutely do not run. Running may elicit a chase response. Scare the wolf off by making loud noises and lifting arms above head to look bigger. Avoid direct eye contact with the wolf. If in a group, group together.

How are we managing wolves in Minnesota?

The wolf population remains firmly established in northern Minnesota, according to a comprehensive population survey directed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The latest survey results estimate that within Minnesota's wolf range there were 438 packs and 2,211 wolves last winter (2012). One of the key factors influencing the wolf population estimate was an increase in the normal wolf pack territory size to about 62 square miles. The increase in territory size likely is caused by fewer deer per square mile.

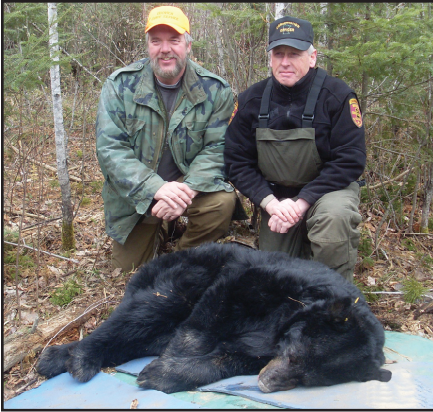
Survey data is collected in mid-winter before pups are born because the birth of pups increases the wolf population each spring. With an estimated 438 packs in Minnesota and an average litter size of four to six, as many as 1,752- 2,600 wolves were added to the population when pups were born this spring. This is part of the annual population cycle for wolves in which numerous pups are born each spring and then the population declines through the rest of the year through various sources of mortality until the next whelping season the following spring. The DNR periodically conducts comprehensive wolf population surveys and annually monitors wolf population indicators such as:

- carnivore scent post surveys
- winter track surveys
- wolf depredation trends

Survey data allows wildlife biologists to evaluate the population's status and help safeguard the long-term survival of the wolf in Minnesota. The DNR will more closely monitor pack and territory sizes in the next few years. More frequent radio collaring of wolf packs will provide additional data on the population's response to wolf season harvest. The DNR will continue to monitor and regulate the take of wolves, to ensure that human-caused mortality will not exceed safe levels for long-term population sustainability. www.dnr.state.mn.us/mam-mals/wolves/mgmt.html

We completed our hike. We unleashed the dogs to play in the field together as we have done so many times before while we took off our snowshoes and made preparations to leave. We whistled the dogs in... all the dogs returned ... but not my Bo.





Dennis Udovich and Ken Soring with bear #56 March 2010 helping Dave and Karen change her radio collar and put in new bright orange ear tags. Many checks are done when the bear is sedated



Dave Garshelis and Karen Noyce looking into bear #56 den March 2010

WORLD'S OLDEST-KNOWN WILD BLACK BEAR DIES AT 39

The world's oldest-known wild bear has died of old age in northern Minnesota at the age of 39½.

Known to DNR researchers as Bear No. 56, the female American black bear was first captured and radio-collared in July 1981 by DNR scientists during the first summer of a long-term research project on bear population ecology. The bear was 7 years old at the time and was accompanied by three female cubs.

Bear No. 56 became a significant animal in the DNR research project. During a 32-year study period, she and her many offspring provided an almost uninterrupted record of reproduction, survival, movements and, eventually, senescence (aging), within a single matriarchal lineage. Data from this bear and her offspring have contributed significantly to the scientific literature on black bear biology.

From 1981-1995, Bear No. 56 produced eight litters of cubs and successfully reared a remarkable 21 of the 22 cubs to 1½ years of age. In 1997, at age 23, she uncharacteristically lost two of her three cubs before weaning. In 1999, at age 25, she bore and raised her last cub. In 2001, when she was next expected to give birth, researchers found her healthy in her den and producing milk but without cubs.

Bear No. 56 outlived by 19 years all of the 360 other radio-collared black bears that DNR researchers have followed since 1981. She also outlived any radio-collared bear of any species in the world. Only a very few individual study bears have been reported to reach age 30. The second-oldest was a brown bear that lived to 34.

Researchers suspect Bear No. 56's longevity probably is best attributed to a combination of factors, including the location of her home range in a forested area with few people or major roads; a more reticent nature than that of many bears, in terms of her

avoidance of people; and luck.

“Getting this information about this bear has taken a lot of effort. This really attests to the value of a long-term study with a large sample of bears,” said Dave Garshelis, DNR bear project leader. “Had we not studied so many bears, we likely would not have encountered this intriguing outlier. It was not just documenting that she lived to be so old, but understanding how she was able to live to be so much older than other bears that made this incredibly interesting and useful.”

In the last few years of her life, Bear No. 56 began to visit some hunters’ baits, but hunters passed up shooting her, abiding by a DNR request that hunters not shoot colored bears.

When last handled in March 2010, Bear No. 56 was a healthy weight but her teeth showed excessive wear and her eyes were clouding. Since then, her hearing and eyesight continued to deteriorate. Rarely observed through most of her life, Bear No. 56 had been observed by people during the past two summers with increasing frequency, foraging along trails and traveling dirt roads, likely because of the greater ease of travel than in the woods.

Sometime in July, Bear No. 56 left her normal home range, as bears often do in late summer, to explore other areas for rich food sources on which to fatten for winter. After locating her radio signal several miles from her typical home area, DNR bear researcher Karen Noyce found her decomposed body in a secluded wooded location. From all indications, she died a quiet death, with no sign of struggle at the site and no evidence of broken bones or traumatic injury.

“This is the first bear in our study to die of old age, and there is something satisfying in that,” said Noyce, who, along with Ken Soring, DNR’s current enforcement director, conducted the first capture of Bear No. 56 as a rookie biologist in 1981.

“We knew she was getting feeble,” Noyce said. “It would have been sad to find her on the side of the road somewhere, hit by a car. After following her all these years, I’m glad to know she died peacefully. It was a fitting death for a fine old bear.”

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By Karen Hauserman

One hundred years ago Woodrow Wilson was president, the life expectancy was 47. Minimum wage was 22 cents an hour. There were about 8000 cars in America with 144 miles of paved roads for them, the maximum speed limit in cities was 10MPH. The American flag had 48 stars. Sugar was 4 cents a pound, while eggs were 14 cents a dozen. Only 8% of homes had phones, however a three minute phone call from NY to MN was \$11.00. Sometimes prices do go down. Marijuana, heroin and morphine were all over the counter drugs. They weren't really big sellers, Vicks vapor rub and Aspirin sold a lot better. Births at home accounted for over 95% and Vince was no exception to that.

Vince Shute was born 100 years ago in Greaney Minnesota on December 4 1913 , to Stefan and Anna. They already had five daughters (Ann, Mary, Amelia (Molly), Angela, and Barbara). Vince often jokingly stated her "never married because he had five older sisters". I am sure there are many who can relate to that. Vince's parents had immigrated from the Ljubljana area of Slovenia. His father came in 1890 and his mother came in 1903 with their 13 year old daughter Ann. His grandfather Johann Shute 1840-1910, had come in 1888.

Vince was born into a hard working family who farmed their land, they had cattle/cow and chickens, for meat, milk and eggs, and planted vegetables. Vince also hunted and fished in his early days. His mom and sisters cooked and did a lot of canning, and preparing the harvest for winter and leaner times. Like most people from that area they were hard workers, and self sufficient. No doubt that is where Vince received his work ethics and self reliance.

As a young man Vince once trained to be an insurance investigator but his heart was not in an office but rather in the woods. He was also quite the boxer in his day and almost went professional. His mom was afraid he would get hurt and talked him out of it. He also was needed at home. His father became quite ill when Vince was about 14 years old, rendering him unable to work. Vince took on as head of the house hold as he felt it was his obligation to work so his sisters could stay in school. At first Vince took on odd jobs then worked in the woods for other loggers, learning the business.

By the age of 29 Vince bought a few tracks of land and began his own logging business. His first logging camp was where the VSWS is today. As a logger he was ahead of the times and brought the first chain saw to Northern Minnesota, It weighed fifty pounds, had a three foot bar, along with a slip clutch, enabling it to make horizontal as well as vertical cuts. This saw is on display at VSWS. At that time the loggers were afraid of it, fearing they would

get hurt so Vince was the only one who used it. He also purchased one of the first hydraulic log loaders as well as a Timberjack skidders to pull full trees from the woods. He built a portable saw mill which could be hauled from one logging site to another. Some of Vince's old logging equipment has been restored by his nephew Frank Polasky and is on display at VSWS. To this day you might find Frank having an early morning breakfast in Orr at Pattons Cafe. He is quite the old timer himself, reminiscent of days and times gone by.

So when did Vince start feeding bears?

That is still debatable, because at first he did not tell anyone about it. In actuality it most likely was going on since the early forty's but unknowingly so. With the logging camps so remote there was always a compost pile, growing and changing on a daily basis. At night the bears would come in and feast (as Vince said). "At the time they did not bother anyone" and only came at night when the "racket" settled down. Don't forget Black Bears are very timid, and really try to avoid any human contact.

After Vince retired and the compost pile was not so abundant with fresh foods, they began breaking into his cabin and Vince shot scores of them. One day after shooting one he went into town bragging that he just shot the last bear in Minnesota. Upon his return home he went into his cabin, one bear was sitting on his couch (Vince always said he was reading the news paper), another was sniffing at his table. As soon as they saw Vince they "high tailed out through the window," he said it "seemed as if they could not get out fast enough". That was when he realized "They are not mean only hungry". Since he loved living in the woods, and did not want to keep shooting them, nor did he want to move. He thought "maybe if I feed them out side they will stay out side". At first he just began with the table scraps, grease and dog food put out away from his buildings, but in more carefully selected areas than just one compost pile. It worked for Vince and was his way of peaceful co existence, before that term was ever even heard of.

While the ABA/VSWS does not recommend such feeding (see our policy on feeding in this issue) Vince would always say, "I cant live with a hungry bear, and they are not mean only hungry". Seems he was not only on the cutting edge as far as logging goes but also with co existence.

After he retired in the 1970's he began regular daily feedings quite like what happens today. As time went on he began naming the bears. He said they became family. Generations of black bears came over the years, the group of bears grew, so did the expense and work load on Vince.

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.



BEAR IN MIND

Word got out about this very special trust between Vince and the bears, locals began dropping by at feeding time. Soon people from all over the country were visiting Vince's place. He soon had near constant visitation, and would often invite visitors in for coffee and bear treats. What began as a method of survival soon became a labor of love. Along with that, Vince was becoming a legend in his own time.

So how and when did Vince's place become ABA/VSWS?

Well that is a whole other story for another time, or you can read about it in the book written by Brian Galusha and the volunteers of the VSWS, "They're Not Mean, Just Hungry" available in the gift shop at VSWS.

Vince passed away at the age of 86 on July 4, 2000. He died quietly and peacefully in his sleep, surrounded by many stuffed bears, nature books, and photographs his many friends had given him over the years. Per his wishes some of his ashes are buried alongside his best bear friend Duffy in the cedar woods on the sanctuary they both so loved.

Through the ABA, and many hard working, dedicated volunteers Vince's dream lives on. Sanctuary visitation is around 20,000 persons a season (Memorial Day-Labor Day). A true legend in his own right, he has left a legacy, where people can come, observe and learn the true nature of the black bear. VSWS is his gift to present and future generations of bears and people. Thank you Vince!



Kathryn and Laruen, ABA interns, at Vince grave site St Bridget's Catholic Cemetery



Vince Shute on the left, was the best man at Joe and Mary Kralls wedding August 1945



Bear sanctuary volunteers and interns take a day off.

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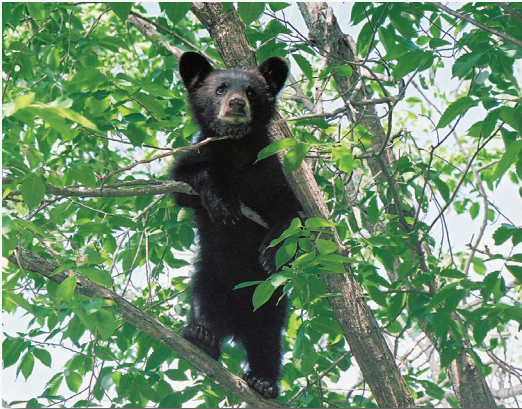
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Bill Light, long term volunteer and dear friend of the sanctuary, passed away last January. In honor of his memory members of the Bois Fort band in Nett Lake performed a traditional ceremony to dedicate the new handicap lift at the sanctuary.



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SCHWINN IS BACK!

Story by Rhonda Schrader

“Schwinn is back!” those are the words everyone at the Vince Shute Wildlife Sanctuary eagerly waits to hear around sometime in July. This year everyone was holding their breath in anticipation as hot July days slowly started creeping off the calendar, and it was getting later and later. Is he going to show up? When? Will this be the year he never comes and we will fear the worse? Where is he?

Low and behold, the most famous 3-legged bear, Schwinn, came bouncing on in, in his usual fashion, on July 27th and no worse for wear. This will be Schwinn’s 14th year at the sanctuary, and he is now 16 years old. He first came to the sanctuary in 1999 at the young age of 2. Black bears in the wild average a life expectancy of 10 years. Not only has Schwinn conquered his disability, but he also surpassed the life expectancy of your average black bear.

This bear is not only smart, but also determined to live with all the odds stacked against him. For 16 years, Schwinn has stayed away from hunter’s bait stations and away from the dangers of roads and vehicles. When at the sanctuary, he is a favorite amongst the volunteers. There are times when the volunteers would try to sneak special treats to Schwinn and have to be reminded that there should be no preferential treatment of any of the bears at the sanctuary. Alas, I’m sure Schwinn still received a little extra something come feeding time to fatten him up for the winter hibernation.

While Schwinn is laid back and mellow and shows no fear at the sanctuary, it is proba-

ably a different story when he is off sanctuary grounds. Many times VSWS has sent out press releases asking for word from the public as to the whereabouts of this 3-legged bear as he would be easy to spot. The phone still has yet to ring to solve the mystery of where exactly Schwinn disappears to when not at the sanctuary. In this case, his disappearance and fear of humans outside of sanctuary grounds has kept Schwinn out of trouble and alive to come back year after year.

Every year it seems like it takes Schwinn a little bit longer to reach the sanctuary. We can only theorize as to why this is. Does he need to take more breaks, as he gets older taking him longer? Was he fooling around with a particularly hot female bear during mating season to sidetrack him? Did his favorite berry patch he visits on his trek into the sanctuary this year produce a bumper crop he had to finish off before continuing? Was it too hot to continue on and he decided to chill in a pond catching frogs for a few days? We will never know the answer to these questions or where Schwinn heads off to when he leaves the sanctuary. We only know when he shows up in the summer, he is moving a little bit slower every year.

It is our hope that Schwinn keeps blessing us with his presence every year, and we can all learn from his strength and determination to thrive against all odds. How many more years will this happen? We don't know, but one of the oldest bears in Minnesota lived to 39 years old. This gives us faith Schwinn will continue to bring hope and educate all our many visitors to the sanctuary for many years to come.

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Photo credit Dennis Udovich and Tim Halverson



Bear eating berries near the viewing deck.



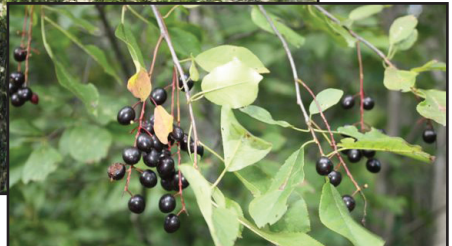
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