



Factsheets: American black bear subspecies

#1: California black bear (*Ursus americanus californiensis*)



California black bear photographed in the Sequoia National Park, California
Photograph by John Sullivan - courtesy PDPhoto.org

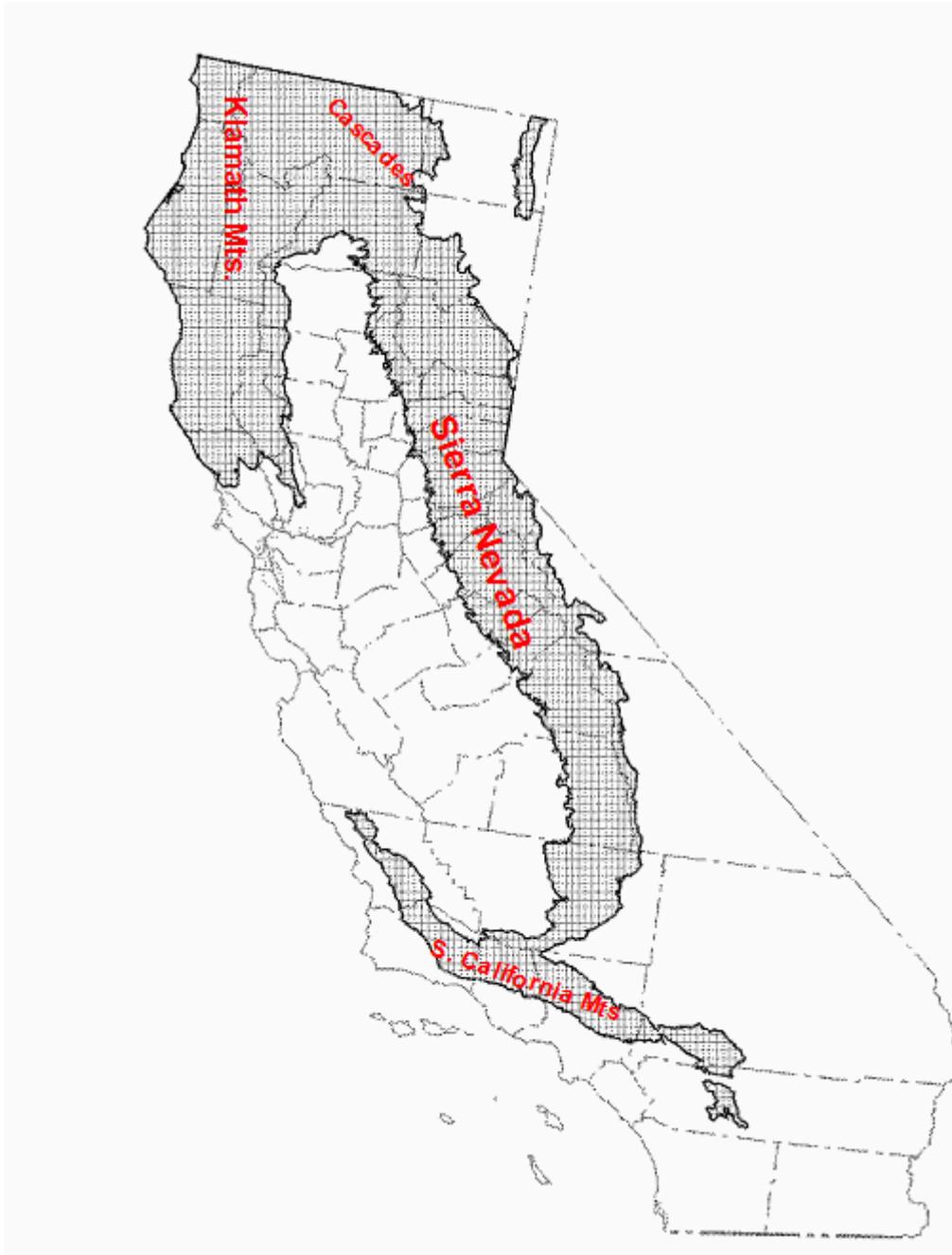
Accepted scientific name: *Ursus americanus californiensis* (Miller, 1900)

Description: Males up to 120 cm tall at the shoulder and commonly weigh 135 to 160 kg but up to 270 kg. Females up to 105 cm at the shoulder and weigh around 70 kg but up to 160 kg.

Range: Differentiation between distinct black bear populations is difficult in California, even at the subspecies level, as there are no significant barriers to bear movement between habitat areas. However three regional sub-populations have been identified and these are the North Coast / Cascade population, the Sierra Nevada population and the Central Western / Southwestern population. The Sierra Nevada population in both California and Nevada is comprised of the California black bear. These bears are also found in the Cascade Range of northern California and south central Oregon. This subspecies of black bear is thought to be geographically separated from the Olympic black bear (*Ursus americanus altifrontalis*) by the crest of the Klamath Mountains in the north of California (see map overleaf).

Habitat: Populations are densest in forested areas with a wide variety of seral (succession) stages; they are found in mountainous areas, scrub lands, and river and lake areas that have fish and fat-rich insects. Much of the habitat is administered by the U.S. Forest Service and Yosemite, Kings Canyon / Sequoia National Parks form part of the region.

Status: Known as the Sierra Nevada population, estimated to consist of 10,000 to 15,000 individuals. Population is probably stable or increasing.



American black bear range in California with relevant mountain ranges
(California Department of Fish & Game / Bear Conservation)

Life span: Average in the wild is 18 years.

Food: California black bears are omnivorous. The bulk of their diet comes from plants and insects. They eat grass, berries, buds, flowers, nuts, grubs, insects, honey, fish and small mammals.

Behaviour: The mating season is in June and July. The bears go into winter dens by late December and emerge in April and May, but do not truly hibernate. Dens may be on the forest floor or high in trees. Pregnant females give birth in the den around the beginning of February to between one and four cubs. The cubs will remain with their mother for about one and a half years, during which time she will not become pregnant again.

Threats: California black bears are adversely effected by habitat loss, conflict with humans, hunting and climate change. Whilst habitat loss is deemed to be the leading threat to wildlife populations in California (California Department of Fish & Wildlife) over half of the suitable black bear habitat in California is in public ownership and projections indicate that, within California at least, only 1 percent of existing black bear habitat is expected to be lost every ten years.

MORE INFORMATION

[Bear hunting in California: the end of an era](#) (Guardian newspaper, December 2012).

[Animal Ceremonialism in Central California in the light of Archaeology](#) (American Anthropologist, 1940).

For more links see the web version of this document at
<http://www.bearconservation.org.uk/page46.html>

CITATION

California Department of Fish & Game (now known as California Department of Fish & Wildlife) "[Black Bear Management Plan](#)" (July 1998)

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