



MAINE DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
Biologist Randy Cross of the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife circles behind a chocolate-phase black bear during the department's annual spring trapping season. Bears are trapped, then released, and female bears are fitted with radio or GPS collars so they can be studied over the coming years.

A brown black bear?

Maine researchers capture unusual 123-pound bruin

BY JOHN HOLYOKE
BDN STAFF

Randy Cross has been studying the state's black bears for a long time, and each spring, he and his crew spend more than a month trapping bears that they'll "enlist" into Maine's long-running research project.

One thing he has learned over the years: Every season is different.

"I've trapped bears for 34 years, and most people would assume I've seen it all," Cross said during a conversation in his subterranean office at the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife's Bangor headquarters. "I know better, because every trap season, there are surprises, things I've never seen. But this trap season was very unusual."

The bear biologist and his crew set foot-hold snare traps in one of three research areas — one Down East, one just north of Old Town and another in Aroostook County — each year. After 34 years of doing so, Cross has accumulated plenty of data, and he generally knows what to expect.

This year, trapping in the Bradford Study Area north of Old Town from May 17 until June 23, Cross saw a few things he didn't expect.

Among them: More adult females were captured than males; More bears were trapped in the area than had been trapped in the same locations a year before; and a



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Wildlife biologist Randy Cross and summer intern Joanna Ennis pose with a rare chocolate-phase black bear captured during the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife's annual spring trapping season.

rare chocolate-phase black bear, with a deep brown coat, was among the bears the team caught.

Cross said that in the Bradford area, with some traps being set as close as five miles from the city of Old Town's outer boundary, catching bears is historically difficult.

He said more than 300 years of farming and European settlers has made the bears in the area avoid humans, who often viewed them as undesirable and tried to keep the animals off their farmland.

"The only bears that persisted in this area were bears that showed the highest human-avoidance behavior," Cross said.

"Over time, it's sort of like selective breeding, in that you're removing the [animals] that don't pass the test, so to speak. Over time, that changes the nature of the whole population, behavior-wise."

In the Down East, the bears are similar. In northern Maine's study area, however, there wasn't much settling and farming, and the bears remain naive and easier to catch, Cross said.

But this year, Cross and his team had no problem catching bears in the Bradford area, even after trapping in the same spots in 2015.

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JOHN HOLYOKE

Acadia memories on a special day

Many of us Mainers, who grew up not-so-far from Acadia National Park, likely grew up taking the place for granted.

I know I did.

When I was very young, trips to Mount Desert Island were infrequent, and I seem to remember complaining about spending so much time in the car. As I reached high school and college age, I made a point to head "to the island," as we began calling it, as often as I could.

Still, I don't think I really appreciated the gift that sits just 45 miles from Bangor — an easy ride, even when thousands of tourists crowd Route 1A and traffic slows to a crawl in Holden and Ellsworth.

On Friday, I'll take a moment to try to do better, and to spend a few minutes thinking about all of the great times and wonderful scenes I've taken in while visiting Acadia.

Why Friday?

Well, it's a pretty important day. On July 8, 1916 — 100 years ago — President Woodrow Wilson established Sieur de Monts National Monument on Mount Desert Island. Three years later, the place was renamed "Acadia," and became an official national park.

And since its origination, it has been a true gift to visitors from around the globe.

As part of an upcoming project, I was recently tasked with asking a variety of people what Acadia meant to them. Today, I'll turn that question around, and share some thoughts and memories of my own, gathered over several decades.

Today, I'm happy to say, I take Acadia much less for granted, and have come to more fully appreciate its grandeur and the experiences I've had there.

I remember my first popover at Jordan Pond House, sitting on the lawn with dozens of other guests, enjoying a beautiful summer day. I also remember that a swarm of bees was very interested in the jam that sat on each table.

I remember a day, years later, leading my future wife and her children on a hike around Jordan Pond. Well, "leading" is probably the wrong word. The kids led. For the most part, we followed ... or struggled to keep up.

The iconic views from the top of Cadillac are certainly stunning; earning those views by actually hiking up one of Acadia's many peaks is even more rewarding.

I remember many trips around Park Loop Road, and the manda-

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1-Minute Hike: Black Mountain Cliffs, Schoodic Beach

Difficulty: Moderate-strenuous. The Black Mountain Cliffs loop — from the parking lot to the mountain's west peak, down to Schoodic Beach, and back to the parking lot — is about 3 miles long. But to get the best views, you will need to hike off that loop about 1 mile to the mountain's east peak, then backtrack to get back to the loop. In total, that will make for a 5-mile hike. The trail includes



AISLINN SARNACKI

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plenty of rocky spots and exposed tree roots, requiring hikers to watch their step, but the trail does not require hand-over-foot technical hiking. There are no ladders or metal rungs.

How to get there: The trailhead for the Black



A sign marks a trail intersection atop the east peak of Black Mountain, which rises just over 1,000 feet above sea level near the town of Franklin.

Mountain Cliffs Trail is at the Schoodic Beach Parking Lot in the Donnell Pond Public Reserved Land unit. To get there from Route 1 in Sullivan, turn onto Route 183 (across from Town

Landing Road) and drive 4.3 miles and turn left onto the gravel Schoodic Beach Road. Drive 0.3 mile and veer left at the fork to stay on Schoodic Beach Road. Drive 1.9 mile to the Sc-

hodic Beach Parking Lot at the end of the road. Start your hike at the far end of the parking area, past the kiosk, on the wide, smooth trail that leads to Schoodic

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Photo exhibit reveals scenery of proposed Maine national park

BY AISLINN SARNACKI
BDN STAFF

Deep in Maine's North Woods, Thomas Mark Szelog has sat in his camouflage blind for days, watching for a moose or bear. His unobtrusive way of photographing wildlife in remote areas requires patience and fortitude, but the rewards are worth it, he said.

He has watched a mother bear and her two cubs drink from a stream, totally unaware of his presence. And he may very well be the only man who's ever had a cow moose use his body as a scratching post — for its rear end.

"The only thing between us was the cloth blind," he said.

Over the past decade, Thomas Mark Szelog and his wife of 27 years, Lee Ann Szelog, have logged more than 25,000 miles driving rough woods roads, bushwhacking through thick forests and paddling

streams through the North Woods to produce stunning, authentic photographs of the vast region.

And now, for the first time, a handful of these remarkable wildlife and landscape photographs are on display in the exhibit "Imagine the Maine Woods National Park," which can be seen through July 31 in the Barbara Kramer Gallery in the Belfast Free Library.

As the exhibit's name implies, the show isn't simply about outdoor photography. The Szelogs are stout supporters of the proposed 3.2-million-acre Maine national park, which was conceptualized more than 20 years ago by the nonprofit group RESTORE: The North Woods.

"When you hear about the Maine Woods National Park, nobody talks about the ecological benefits and what it means to the wildlife," Lee Ann Szelog said.

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