

# Bears

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“I’d almost guarantee you that she was almost totally blind,” Cross said. “A 30-year-old has really cloudy eyes. And they’re not doing well [physically] by the time they get into their 30s.”

## Bear weight-loss program

Want to lose weight like a bear? Well, there are at least two ways to do that. First, you can go to bed for six months and refuse to eat. That’ll probably work.

Or, you can do what “Dozer” the bear — and other males — do: Focus your life on mating.

Last week Cross passed along data on Dozer, a bear that he and the crew caught twice during the spring capture season, as they were trying to live-trap females to add to the study group.

Over that 12-day span between captures, the 20-year-old bruiser lost 34 pounds, dropping from 442 pounds to 408.

During that breeding period, which starts in late May, peaks in mid June, and can last until August, the

bears eat sparingly while on the run, and spend much of their time pursuing females and fighting for the opportunity to breed with them, he said.

And younger bears lose weight even more rapidly, Cross said.

“The ones that will lose the most weight are the ones that are just getting big enough to really try hard [to find a mate],” Cross said. “When they’re 5 or 6 they’re getting to the size to the point where they feel like they have a reasonable chance of success.”

In order to have that “success,” Cross said they’ll likely have to fight off bigger bears in order to mate with the female. The smaller the bear, the more fighting he’ll have to do.

And the fights are frequent.

“They’re going to fight a lot more than a big guy like Dozer, who’s going to walk in with not many marks on him,” Cross said.

“Those ones that are just getting into it, they’re fighting like crazy,” he said. “They’re fighting everyone.”

And they’re losing weight in the process.

## Six cubs in a litter?

Finally, Cross said there’s a bear-related mystery in Aroostook National Wildlife Refuge in Caswell that biologists will likely never solve: Several people have seen a six-cub litter running around.

Cross said he has seen an occasional four-cub litter, but never a five-cub group from the same mother. Six? While possible, he’s got questions.

“You don’t know if they’re natural-born,” Cross said, explaining that in some cases, bear cubs are “adopted” or misplaced, and end up growing up with another mother’s cubs.

“One [of our study bears] started with three female cubs [when we visited the den] and ended up with one of her own female cubs, and two females and a male cub from some other bear [when we visited a year later],” Cross said. “I think it was a cub swap, and probably with [the litter of] her granddaughter or daughter.”

There is a way to find out if the six cubs are siblings, but Cross said the DIF&W isn’t apt to do so.

“Of course, the first thing you think of is to get

a warden with a culvert trap, get out there, catch ‘em all, and take genetic samples to make sure they’re all hers and not adopted,” Cross said. “But there’s not a reason to really do that except ‘It would be cool to know.’ It’s not going to change our management because of one freak occurrence, because it really would be a freak occurrence [for a single bear to raise six cubs].”

Cross said that even in litters of four cubs, the survival of all four isn’t guaranteed, and he thinks it’s fairly likely that these six cubs are not from the same litter.

When six cubs are vying for nutrition and the mother bear is trying to keep them safe at the same time, the odds are against the survival of all of the bears.

“I would expect most six-cub litters to only be [reduced to] three or four at this time [of year] because of the trouble trying to produce enough milk for that many and to keep track of them and keep any of them from being predated or just lost or separated or something,” Cross said.

# Holyoke

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Sept. 14 to Oct. 30 and still-hunting or stalking bears is allowed from Aug. 31 to Nov. 28.

The state estimates Maine’s bear population at more than 31,000.

## Share your bear tale!

Bear season began Saturday with Youth Bear Day, and adult hunters were allowed to hit the woods Monday. By now — despite all that natural food — I’m sure a few of you have had success.

As always, we’re interested in hearing your tales and looking at your photos. If you’ve got a bear-hunting story, please drop me a line at the email address listed below.

As the season progresses, I hope to share a few of those photos and stories with BDN readers.

So, what makes for a good bear story? It varies, but here are some guidelines: Big bears are great — the bigger the better.

If your bear weighs 400 pounds, you’ve got my attention. If it weighs 500 pounds

As always, we’re interested in hearing your tales and looking at your photos.

If you’ve got a bear-hunting story, please drop me a line at [jholyoke@bangordailynews.com](mailto:jholyoke@bangordailynews.com).

or more, I hope you’ll sit down and start sending us your photos as soon as possible.

Misadventures are cool, as long as nobody gets hurt. Tenacity and determination always make for good stories. And kids bagging their first bears with help from their relatives (or a guide) can often make for interesting column fodder.

We obviously can’t publish everything we receive, but will do the best that we can.

So good luck! And I hope to hear from you soon.

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# Woods

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When Bryson attempted the actual hike that led to him writing the book, he was in his 40s. Redford is 79. Nolte is 74.

To be sure, older hikers exist (though, I’d posit, not many of them resemble the portly Nolte if they’re going to have any luck on the trail).

My fear: That the movie version of “A Walk in the Woods” would devolve into a formulaic version of an old standard. “Grumpy Old Men Take a Hike.”

Fortunately, that doesn’t happen.

Instead, the focus is on the interplay between Redford’s Bryson and Nolte’s Katz, a former friend of the author, after a long estrangement.

When Catherine Bryson reminds her husband, during the planning phase of the trip, that Katz used to get on his nerves, the response is classic and sets the tone for the rest of the movie.

“No,” Bryson says. “We started off on each others’ nerves. We ended up despising each other.”

As the bumbling Katz is the only “friend” to accept Bryson’s invitation for the adventure of a lifetime, he’s left with the overweight, limping former boozehound and womanizer as his companion.

Nolte is captivating from his shambling arrival on screen, shuffling off a small plane looking like he’d already hiked the entire Appalachian Trail: Shaggy, lame and exhausted.

Thompson is perfect in the role of Bryson’s wife, and Redford shines as well. The veteran emerges as the sarcastic, quick-witted writer who isn’t eager to go softly into that dark night.

In an entertaining early scene, Bryson tells an awkward TV interviewer that he’s got no plans to retire from writing.

“Writers don’t retire,” he tells the man. “They either drink themselves to death or blow their brains out.”

Or, in this case, they find something — like an epic hike — to keep writing about.

The only criticism: The film doesn’t adequately depict the grittiness of the Appalachian Trail, nor its thru-hikers. Hiking can be a dirty, sweaty business.

Nolte shows up on the trail with a beard, and three states later, it’s the same length. Redford, even after several days on the trail, is always close-shaven and

more or less clean. And aside from falling asleep rather quickly, neither seems overly exhausted by their adventure.

While Bryson himself has said that the release of the movie may actually dissuade people from trying to hike the entire Appalachian Trail, he may be mistaken. The book prompted many to

do so when it became popular, and there’s nothing in the movie version of the tale (save a pretty frightening bear encounter and a pretty serious fall off a cliff) that will likely change that.

Mainers may be disappointed that their section of the Appalachian Trail, which ends at Mount Katahdin, is not featured. That’s a

small concern, however. The scenery that director Kwapis captures on the southern section of the Appalachian Trail is breathtaking in its own right.

Nolte’s character sums up much of that footage as he stands on a peak, looking at the not-so-distant Smoky Mountains.

“Wow.”

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