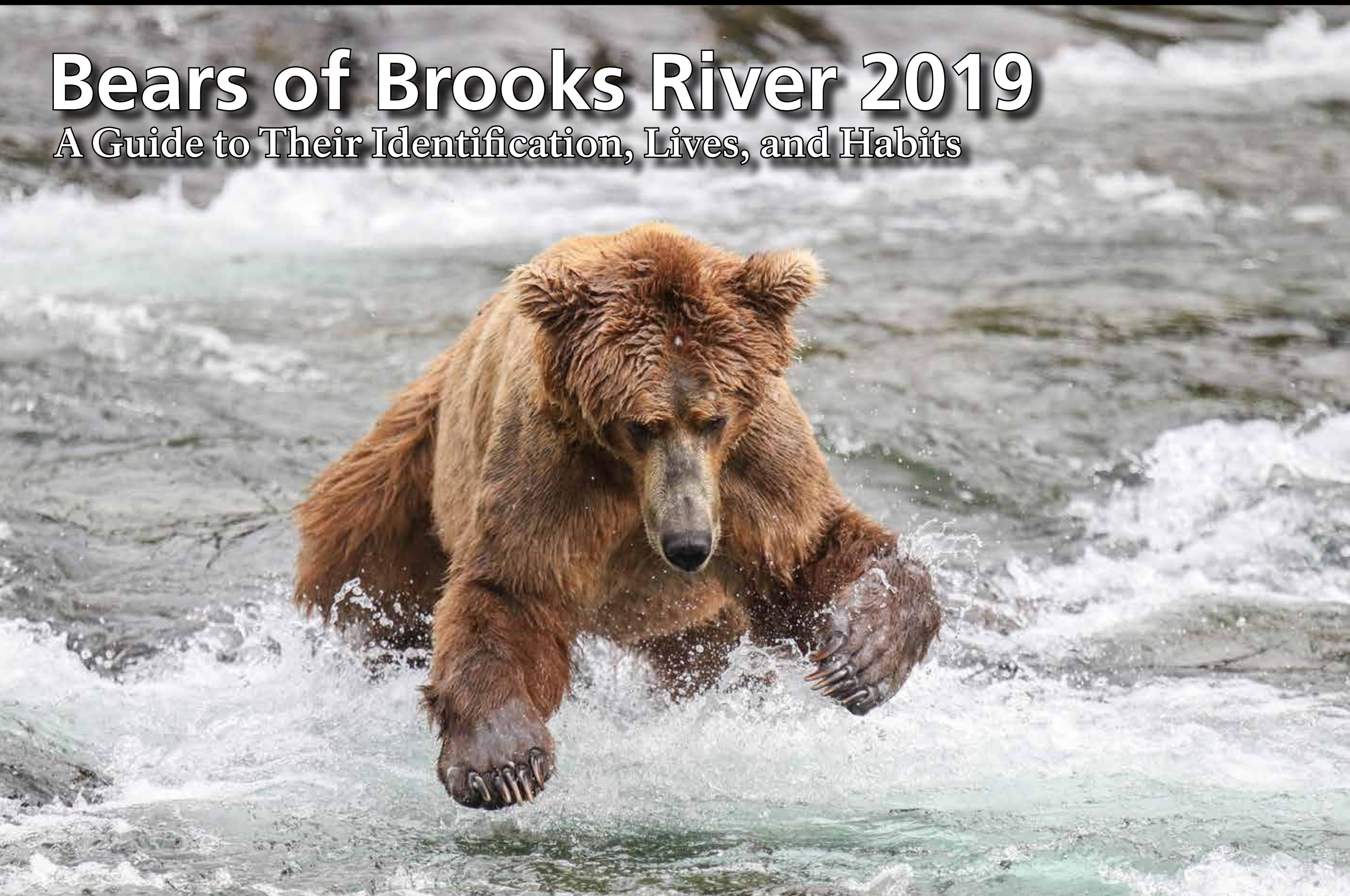




Katmai National Park and Preserve
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Bears of Brooks River 2019

A Guide to Their Identification, Lives, and Habits



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#151 Walker holds a sockeye salmon at Brooks Falls.
NPS/David Kopshever.

Cover photo: Pouncing bear on Brooks River.
M. Bradburn



How to Use this Book

This book is intended to present the basic life histories, habits, and identifying characteristics of some of the most frequently seen bears along Brooks River within Katmai National Park. It is not intended provide a complete checklist of bears at Brooks River, but rather a representative sample.

Chapter one of this book provides general information on Katmai’s brown bears. Chapter two presents more specific information about Brooks River and Brooks Camp. Chapters 3-7 discuss individual bears. In those chapters, bears are arranged first by age classification and sex (adult males, adult females, subadults, and cubs) and then numerically by the number biologists have randomly assigned to them. The final chapter provides information on bears that are no longer seen at Brooks River.

Sample page:

Identification: Look here for information about a bear's body shape, size, color, scars and wounds, shed patterns, ear shape, and claw color.

Life History: Read about a bear's behavioral traits, preferred fishing spots, fishing techniques, important life events, and other pertinent information.

Number, Nickname, other basic information

480 Otis
Year First Identified: Older subadult or young adult in 2001

Identification
In early summer, #480 has a medium to dark blond coat which darkens to brown with blond patches in the fall. He has tan tipped claws, and some scars on both sides of his neck. His ears are wide set and his right ear is floppy. His muzzle is long, straight, and narrow. He also has a prominent scar above his right eye. In the fall months, his body is fat and walrus-shaped with a relatively thick, wrinkled neck.

Life History
#480 was first classified as an older subadult bear in 2001. He, along with #218, uses some of the most efficient fishing techniques at the falls. He prefers the jacuzzi, but unlike many other bears, he is often tolerant of numerous other bears around him while he eats. These bears wait patiently for him to finish and eat any leftover scraps.

Despite the fact that #480 is neither as large nor aggressive as other male bears, he was rarely displaced from his preferred fishing spot in the jacuzzi from 2005-2011. However in recent years, other mature males have surpassed him in size. As a result, #480 has slipped down the bear hierarchy. Bears like #747 and #856 will now regularly displace him from his preferred fishing spots and #814 will steal fish from him.

He is one of the few bears that can successfully fish at Brooks Falls in September. Late in the season, he is often seen fishing in the far pool. #480 may be one of the older bears along the river, but he was once a more playful bear. In 2003, for instance, he was observed playing with many bears including #489 and #634.

Early and Mid-Summer Photos: Look for shed patterns, scars, and less body fat.

Age Classification and Sex

Adult Male



Late Summer and Fall Photos: Compare these with mid-summer photos noting the differences in fur color and overall size.

Each photo is accompanied by a date.

Chapter One: Introducing Katmai's Bears



#402 and her three yearling cubs rest on the beach of Naknek Lake.

Katmai's Most Famous Creature

Shoulder Height: 3-5 feet (.9-1.5 m)

Length: 7-10 feet (2.1-3 m)

Weight (Adult Male): 600-900 pounds (272-408 kg) in mid-summer

Weight (Adult Female): 300-600 pounds (136-272 kg)

Average Life Span: 20 years

The only bears to regularly inhabit Katmai National Park and Preserve are brown bears. Taxonomists currently consider brown bears and grizzly bears to be the same species (*Ursus arctos*). The difference between the two is somewhat arbitrary. In North America, brown bears are commonly distinguished by their access to coastal food sources such as runs of salmon, while grizzlies reside further inland.

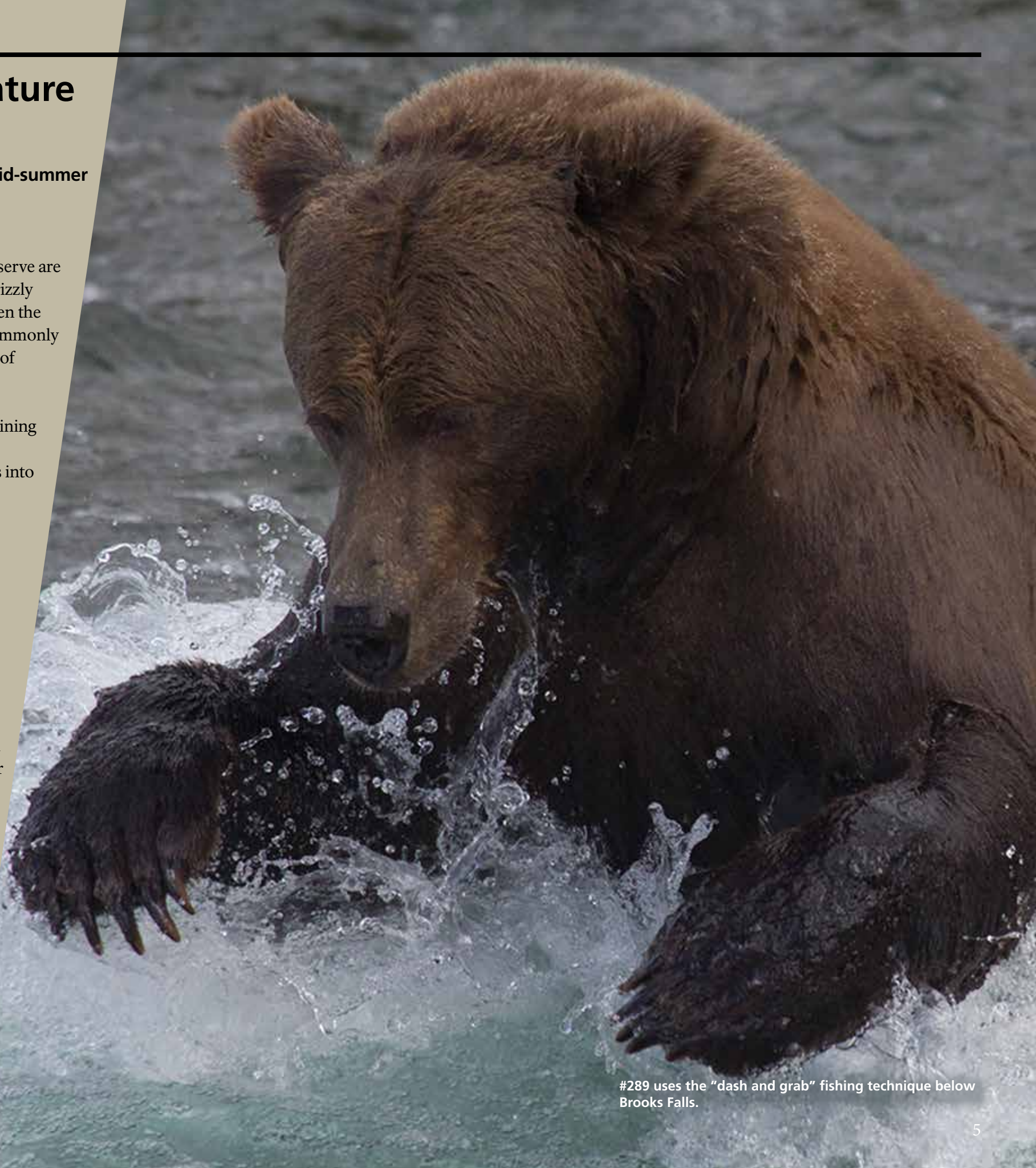
Bears are eating machines, and their survival is dependent on attaining enough calories over the course of the spring, summer, and fall to sustain them through their denning period. As the summer wanes into fall, bears spend an increasing amount of time feeding.

Hearing and vision is estimated to be equivalent to humans, but a bear's sense of smell, which is many times better than a dog's, sets them apart. Bears use scent to communicate everything from dominance to their presence in an area to receptivity to mating.

Brown bears are distinguished from other North American bear species by several physical characteristics. They usually have a rounded and dish-shaped face, unlike the faces of black or polar bears that usually have a more "Roman" nose profile. Polar bears and black bears also lack the prominent shoulder hump found on brown bears. This hump contains muscles that add power to their front legs.

Brown bears' strength comes in part from the rigid anchorage on their thick skeleton, and the position and size of their powerful muscles. Extremely thick bones inside their legs and a plantigrade gait (the whole length of each foot—from heel to toe—touches the ground) help support their great weight.

Brown bears are aptly named for their color. Their brownish fur comes in a wide variety of shades and hues. The fur of brown bears range from blonde to dark brown. As a general rule, their coats tend to darken with age and the season.



#289 uses the "dash and grab" fishing technique below Brooks Falls.

The Individual Bear

It is easy to perceive bears as unthinking animals whose actions are dictated by instinct. Bears eat when they are hungry. They sleep when they are tired. They mate when hormones are right. While instinct influences bear behavior (and it may be the major influence), these animals are also highly intelligent. Like other intelligent animals, bears behave in ways which suggest they have the ability to make decisions and act as individuals.

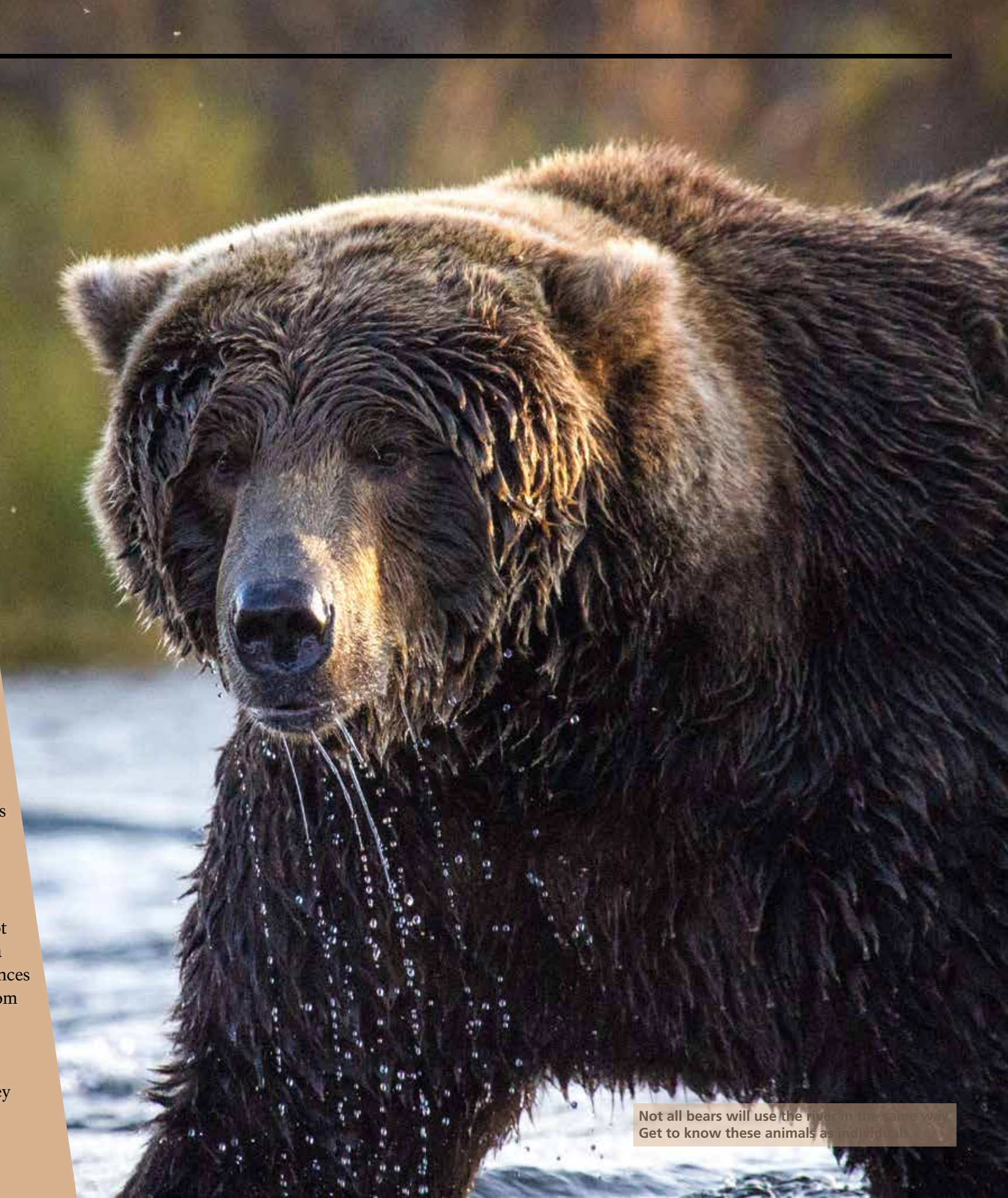
A large male bear steals salmon from smaller bears. Another, equally large male, ignores the salmon smaller bears catch. A big female fishes at Brooks Falls, but the next year when she has cubs, she never ventures within a half kilometer of the falls. An older adult bear, one that has visited Brooks River for years, still flees from approaching anglers in the river. A younger bear, no more than two years removed from its mother, habitually uses the trails within 10 meters of Brooks Lodge. One bear does this, another does that.

Bear watching at Brooks River is unique, because biologists have gathered an incredible amount of information about how bears use this place. This data not only records when and where bears use the river, but also how they use the river—as a group and as individuals.

Even if you only spend one hour watching bears at Brooks River, it is easy to see how each bear is different. These bears are not only distinguished by physical characteristics, but more importantly, they are also distinguished by their habits and behavior. Each bear is a unique individual. Rarely do we have the opportunity to get to know a group of wild animals as individuals. Bear watching at Brooks River, however, gives us that chance.

You are encouraged to get to know the Brooks River bears as the individuals that they are. This book is an aid to their identification. However, providing the information necessary to identify each bear is not the goal or intention of this book. Most importantly, this book serves as a reference for their life history and behavior. A bear's life is full of experiences that are unique to that individual. These experiences affect everything from how they fish to where they den to their tolerance of people.

No matter if you are watching the bears of Brooks River in person or online, take a moment to get to know these animals. The individuality they demonstrate provides great opportunities for us to gain insight into their intelligence and ability to survive in a harsh world.



Not all bears will use the river in the same way.
Get to know these animals as individuals.

Let's Get Fat

Excessive weight gain is key to a bear's survival. Bears must eat an entire year's worth of food in six months or less in order to survive winter hibernation and continued weight loss in the spring. During hibernation, bears can lose 1/4 to 1/3 of their body weight. Lactating females can lose even more.

In contrast to the famine of winter and spring, Katmai's brown bears rapidly regain weight in summer and fall.

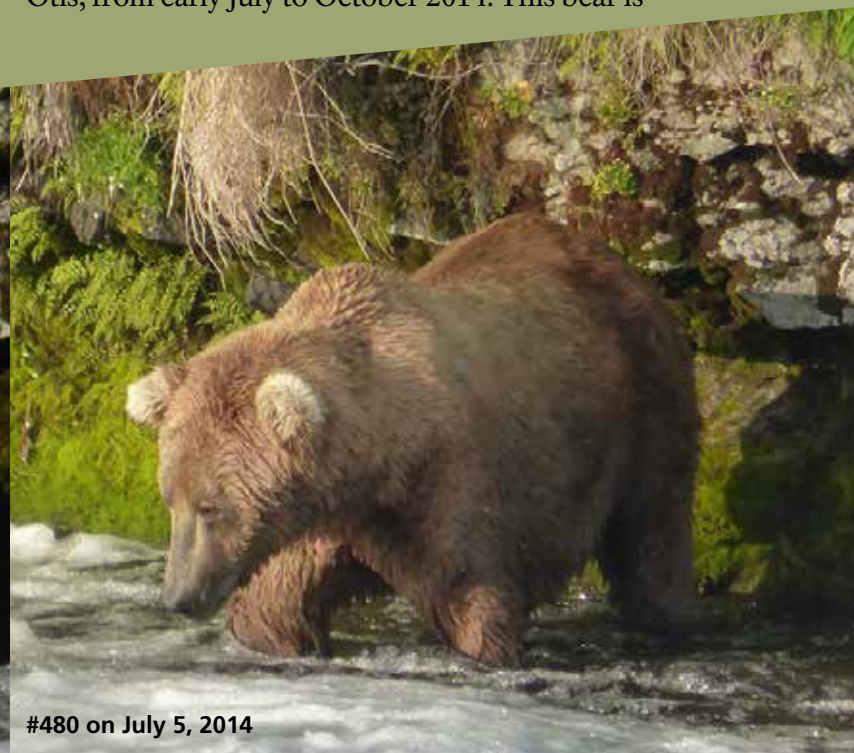
Incredibly, they can sometimes gain as much as one kilogram—over two pounds—of fat per day!

The photos below demonstrate the dramatic weight gain of one Brooks River's more recognizable bears, #480 also known as Otis, from early July to October 2014. This bear is

not the largest on Brooks River, but a reasonable estimate for his mid-summer weight would be 600-700 pounds (272-318 kg). In the fall, this bear might weigh 900 pounds (408 kg) or more.



#480 on July 2, 2014



#480 on July 5, 2014



#480 on July 12, 2014



#480 on July 23, 2014



#480 on September 1, 2014



#480 on September 22, 2014

Bear Hibernation

Originally posted on the blog, **Katmai Terrane:**

One remarkable adaptation that has evolved in some animals is hibernation. Simply and broadly defined, hibernation is a state of dormancy that allows animals to avoid periods of famine. It takes many forms in mammals, but is particularly remarkable in bears.

In the Katmai region, most bears go to their dens and begin hibernation in October and November. Hibernation in bears is most likely triggered by a shortage of high calorie food as well as hormonal changes. After a summer and fall spent gorging on food, a bear's physiology and metabolism shifts in rather incredible ways to help them survive several months without food or water.

When hibernating, a bear's body temperature remains above 88°F (31°C), not much lower than their normal body temperature of 100°F (37.7°C). This is unlike other hibernating mammals, such as ground squirrels whose body temperature drops close to freezing. A bear's heart and respiratory rates, however, drop dramatically. They average only one breath per minute with a heart rate of 8-10 beats per minute in hibernation.

They still need to burn many calories per day while hibernating—sometimes more than 4000 calories per day. When they emerge from their dens in the spring, bears have lost up to 33% of their body weight. Lactating females can lose even more weight.

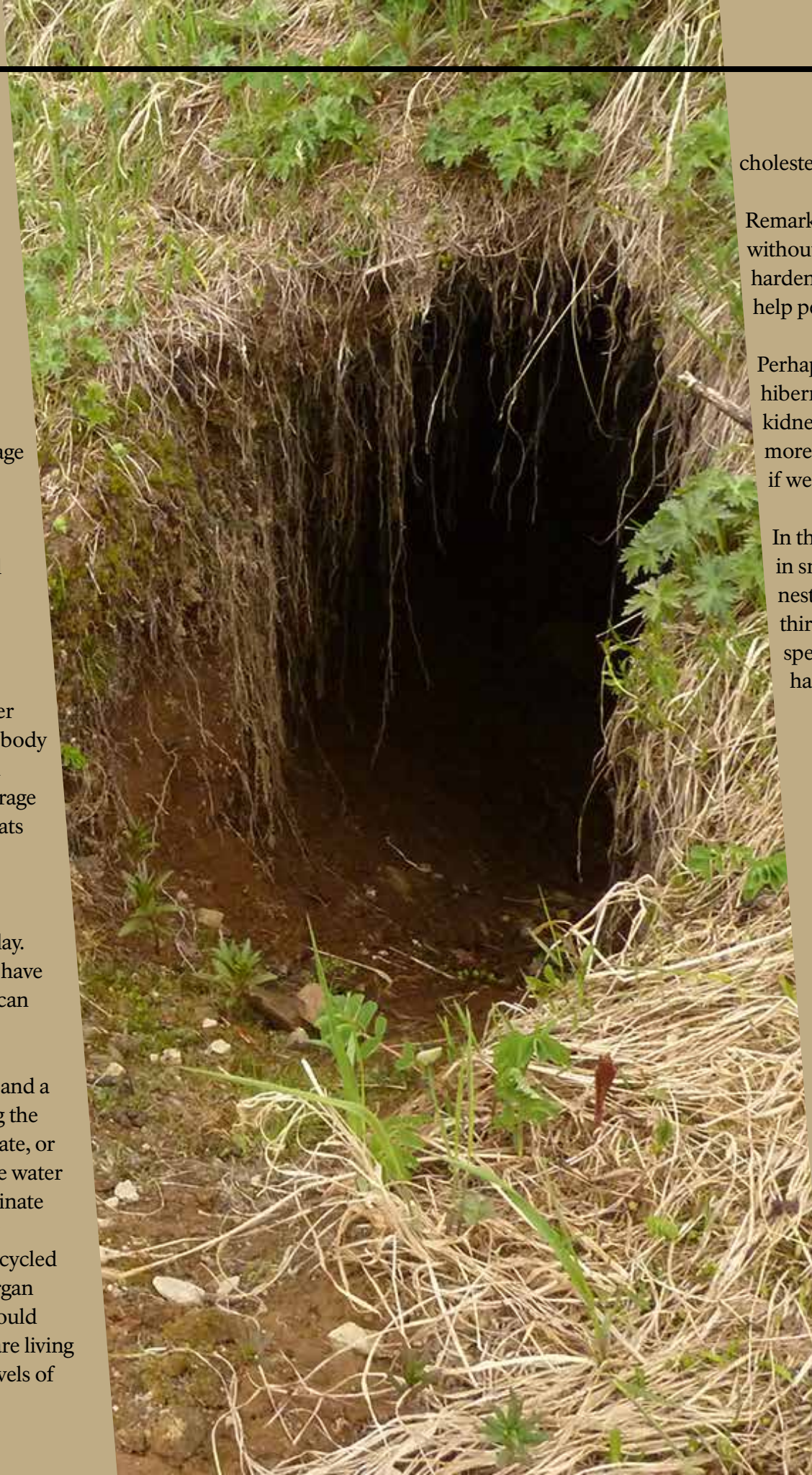
Surviving a winter without food or water requires fuel, and a bear fuels its body on the fat reserves it acquired during the previous summer and fall. Bears do not eat, drink, urinate, or defecate while in the den. Fat is metabolized to produce water and food, but instead of defecating or urinating to eliminate waste, bears recycle it. Their kidneys shut down almost completely and urea, a major component of urine, is recycled into proteins that maintain a bear's muscle mass and organ tissues. Without the ability to recycle urea, ammonia would build to toxic levels and poison the animal. Since they are living off of their stored body fat, bears also have very high levels of

cholesterol in their blood.

Remarkably, healthy bears emerge from hibernation in the spring without losing muscle mass and bone density, or suffering from hardening of the arteries. Can the abilities of a hibernating bear help people in the future?

Perhaps. If we can unlock the physiological secrets of a hibernating bear, then we may be able to find new ways to treat kidney, heart, and bone diseases. We also might be able to more safely send humans on long distance space expeditions if we can find a way to hibernate like a bear.

In the depths of winter, when Katmai's landscape is covered in snow and ice and the wind is howling fiercely, bears are nestled snug in their dens and sleep soundly. They feel no thirst or hunger at this time. Bears are survivors with a very special adaptation—hibernation—that allows them to survive harsh wintertime conditions and famine remarkably well.



In Katmai, bears dig dens on well vegetated, steep slopes typically between 500-1500 feet (152-457 m) in elevation. This abandoned den was found on Dumphling Mountain.

Bear Identification

Individual bears are difficult to identify, especially the first few times you see them. Bears at Brooks River are not tagged or marked for identification. The information in this book is drawn from thousands of hours of data collection, which is used to document long term patterns of bear use along the river.

Often no specific feature is diagnostic of any individual bear. Rangers and biologists use a combination of a bear's physical characteristics, habits, and disposition to identify the animals.

Body Size and Shape

Overall size and shape are useful identification characteristics, but bears grow rapidly from season to season and year to year. It can also be difficult to gauge a bear's size with little or no frame of reference. Therefore, size and shape is sometimes most useful to differentiate between adults or subadult bears. Since bears are sexually dimorphic, size can be used to differentiate between males and females. Adult male bears can grow twice as large as adult females.

Claw Color

Most of Katmai's bears have dark claws, but a few have lighter tan-tipped claws and some even have white claws.

Disposition

There are behaviors that all bears share, but not all bears do the same things in the same way. Some are aggressive towards other bears. They show other bears how dominant they are. Others avoid confrontation and are more subordinate. Some bears are tolerant of people and others will avoid people at almost all costs. These behavioral characteristics are important differences between each bear.

Ears

Bear ears come in a variety of colors, shapes, and sizes. Note if a bear's ears are large or small, triangular or oval, upright or flopped over. Some bears are even missing all or part of an ear. Generally speaking, the ears on adults are more widely spaced than cubs and subadult bears. Some bears also have very light colored ears, even in the fall.



Face

Brown bears typically have dished-shaped faces (i.e. wide with a prominent brow ridge). Like humans though, each bear's face is unique. Look closely at a bear's face to note the shape of its muzzle and the relative position of its eyes.

Fishing Techniques

Bears have an instinct to eat high calorie foods like salmon, but fishing is a learned behavior. Not all bears fish in the same way or in the same places. This offers great insight into their individuality.

Fur Color and Shed Pattern

The color of a bear's fur or coat and the pattern it is shed is somewhat consistent from year to year, but it is important to place fur color within the context of the season and the bear's relative age. A bear's coat generally darkens as it grows from a cub into an adult bear. It also typically darkens from late summer to fall. A blondish bear in July may become dark brown by September.

Scars and Wounds

Almost every bear carries a unique suite of scars and/or wounds. These are very useful for identification. However, wounds heal and a bear's new fall coat can hide scars. Be mindful that not all bears can be identified from scars and wounds alone.

Sex

Is it a male or female? Genitalia is usually only visible on adult males. It is harder to see on females and younger bears. If you can't see a bear's genitalia, then watch them urinate. Male bears will urinate straight down between their hind legs, while females urinate behind them. This is especially useful when trying to determine the sex of cubs.

Cub Killer? Infanticide in Bears

Do male bears kill cubs? If so, why? These are two of the most frequently asked questions rangers hear at Brooks Camp. The answers are paradoxically simple and complicated. Yes, bears kill cubs, but no one is completely sure why. Female bears have been observed killing cubs as well, so the behavior is not restricted to just males.

Infanticide is the term commonly used to describe the killing of a bear cub. During the past 35 years at Brooks River there have been twelve documented cases of infanticide. Several hypotheses have been proposed to explain why bears kill cubs.

Increased Reproductive Potential

Motivation to mate with a female bear may drive a male to kill her cubs. Biologists describe this behavior as sexually selected infanticide. Female bears won't enter estrus ("heat") as long as they are nursing. If a female loses her cubs in spring or early summer, she may enter estrus and become receptive to mating.

Food

Bears are cannibalistic, so hunger may motivate some bears to kill cubs. Even subadult and small adult female bears fall victim to predatory attacks by larger bears.

Reduced Competition

Perhaps some bears view cubs as potential competitors in the future. Through infanticide, a bear can eliminate a competitor at its weakest point.

These ideas have merit, but there is no "one size fits all" explanation for this behavior. Each idea proposed has evidence to contradict it. Cubs are sometimes killed and not eaten. If a bear kills a cub to reduce competition, that may require a level of forethought and intelligence in bears that has yet to be scientifically demonstrated.

Even the idea of sexually selected infanticide has issues. Bears are promiscuous. There is no guarantee that an infanticidal male will sire another litter with the mother, nor is there any guarantee

that the male bear would even have access to the female. A more dominant male could appropriate the female for himself. Even though few infanticides have been witnessed at Brooks River, they occur during spring, summer, and fall—not just during the mating season which peaks in late spring. Female bears kill cubs too, which does not support the idea of sexually selected infanticide either.

Infanticide may be difficult to reconcile from a human point of view, but bears exist and behave outside of our moral and ethical boundaries. This is a behavior that will continue among Katmai's bears as long as they remain wild creatures, and it is a behavior we may never be able to fully understand or explain.



#171 and her two yearlings
in summer 2017.

Chapter Two: Brooks River and Brooks Camp

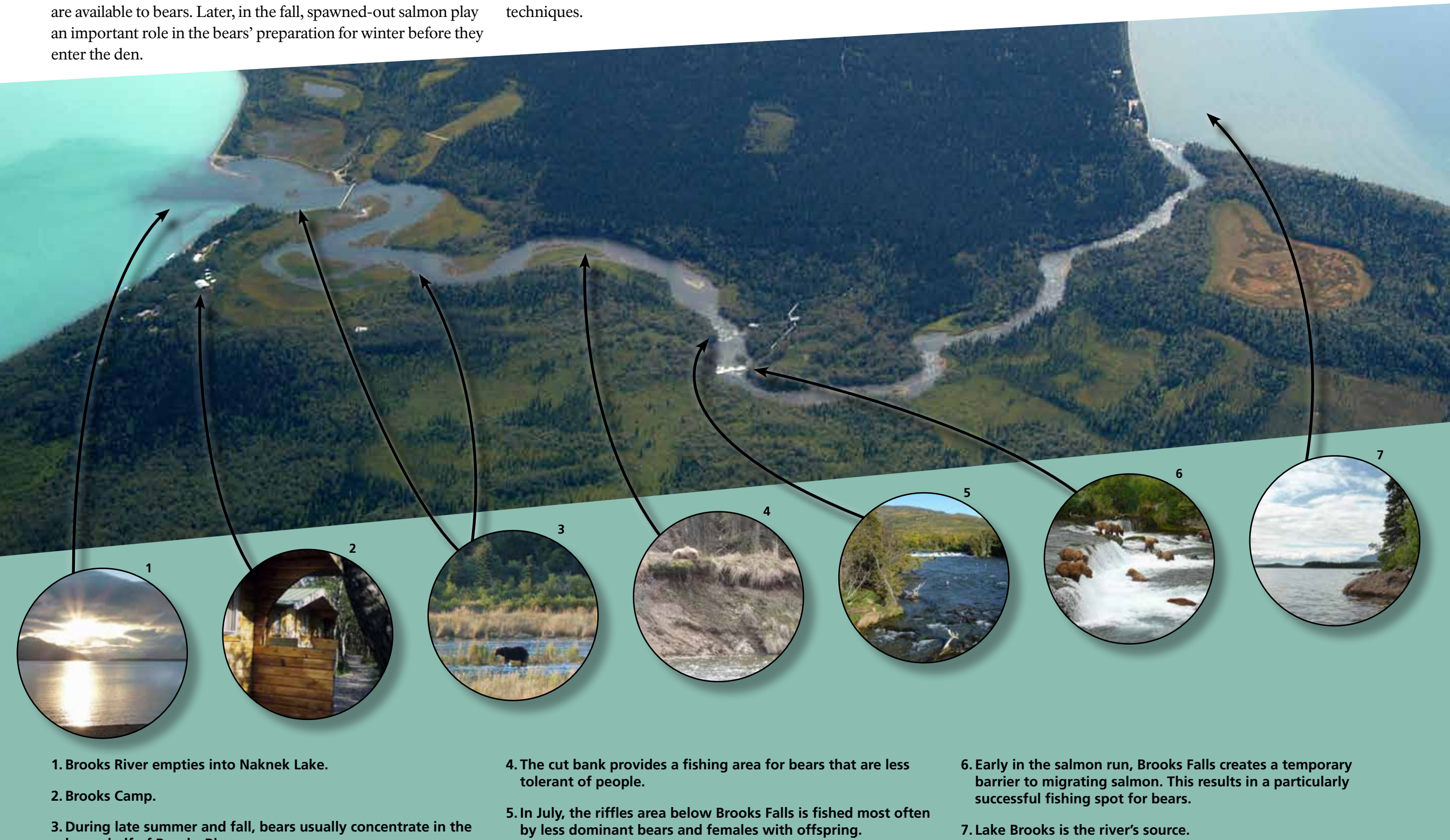


Brooks River and Dumpling Mountain glow under a setting sun.

Brooks River

No more than 1.5 miles (2.4 km) long, Brooks River hosts one of the greatest seasonal concentrations of brown bears anywhere on earth. In early summer, the river becomes one of the first places in the region where bright, energetic, and pre-spawned salmon are available to bears. Later, in the fall, spawned-out salmon play an important role in the bears' preparation for winter before they enter the den.

How, where, and when bears fish along the river depends on many factors such as the time of year, salmon density, locations of salmon spawning activity, the age, and relative position of the bear within its social hierarchy, and a bear's preferred fishing techniques.



Brooks Falls

Brooks Falls creates a temporary barrier for the surge of migrating salmon through Brooks River. Consequently, Brooks Falls is one of the first places in the region where salmon are accessible to bears.

A bear's fishing location is dependent on its skill and where the bear ranks in the hierarchy. Many of the very dominant males

prefer to fish in the plunge pools below Brooks Falls. The jacuzzi is a particularly sought after fishing spot by those bears. Less dominant bears are often forced to fish at other locations. In recent years, the lip of the falls has been used most often by adult females.

Some bears are specialists. They've mastered fishing at only one spot. Other bears are skilled enough to fish nearly anywhere.



1. Fish Ladder: Opened in 1950, it is no longer passable to salmon and bears rarely fish here.



2. Lip: Watch here for bears catching leaping salmon.



3. Jacuzzi: This is one of the most productive and sought-after fishing spots.



4. Far Pool: This spot is often occupied by bears who are less tolerant of people.



5. Less dominant bears often wait downstream for their opportunity to access fishing spots or scavenge dead salmon.



6. Downstream to the riffles and Naknek Lake.

Here Today, Gone Tomorrow: Seasonal Bear Use At Brooks River

Rangers and biologists are frequently asked, “Where are the bears?” The answer depends on the season, but finding the answer is as simple as knowing where the bears are finding food. Patterns of use along Brooks River reflect bears’ ability to learn and adapt to changing conditions—traits that help them survive extreme contrasts between seasons of abundance and famine.

Springtime is a lean season for bears who live in the interior of Katmai National Park and Preserve. Little food is typically

available to bears in the spring, so they are dispersed throughout the area and are only infrequently seen at Brooks Camp in May and June. At this time of the year bears are focused on eating grass and sedge, hunting moose calves, and competing for mates.

When salmon begin to arrive in late June, bears migrate to Brooks River. Bears can be seen fishing at Brooks Falls and in the lower Brooks River throughout the month. Mid-July is typically when the largest number of bears can be seen along the river. After that, bears slowly begin to disperse to other areas.

In August, salmon are beginning to spawn in Brooks River, but they are less concentrated, remain energetic, and are no longer migrating. This creates difficult fishing conditions for bears and almost all of the bears will leave the area. Like June, there are typically days in August when no bears are seen at Brooks Camp. For the bears, salmon fishing is easier in other places.

By late August, many salmon have already spawned and will begin to die. As the fish weaken and die, bears migrate back to Brooks River to feed. In September, bears are usually present in high numbers as they search for dead and dying salmon. In the fall, bear numbers usually peak by the first week in October.



Bears are largely absent from Brooks River except in July, September, and October.

Sockeye Salmon of Brooks River

The rivers, lakes, and streams of Bristol Bay host the closing acts of an epic migration. Each summer tens of millions of sockeye salmon leave the North Pacific, instinctively driven to return to the exact spawning grounds where they hatched years earlier. For several hundred thousand salmon the path leads up Brooks River.

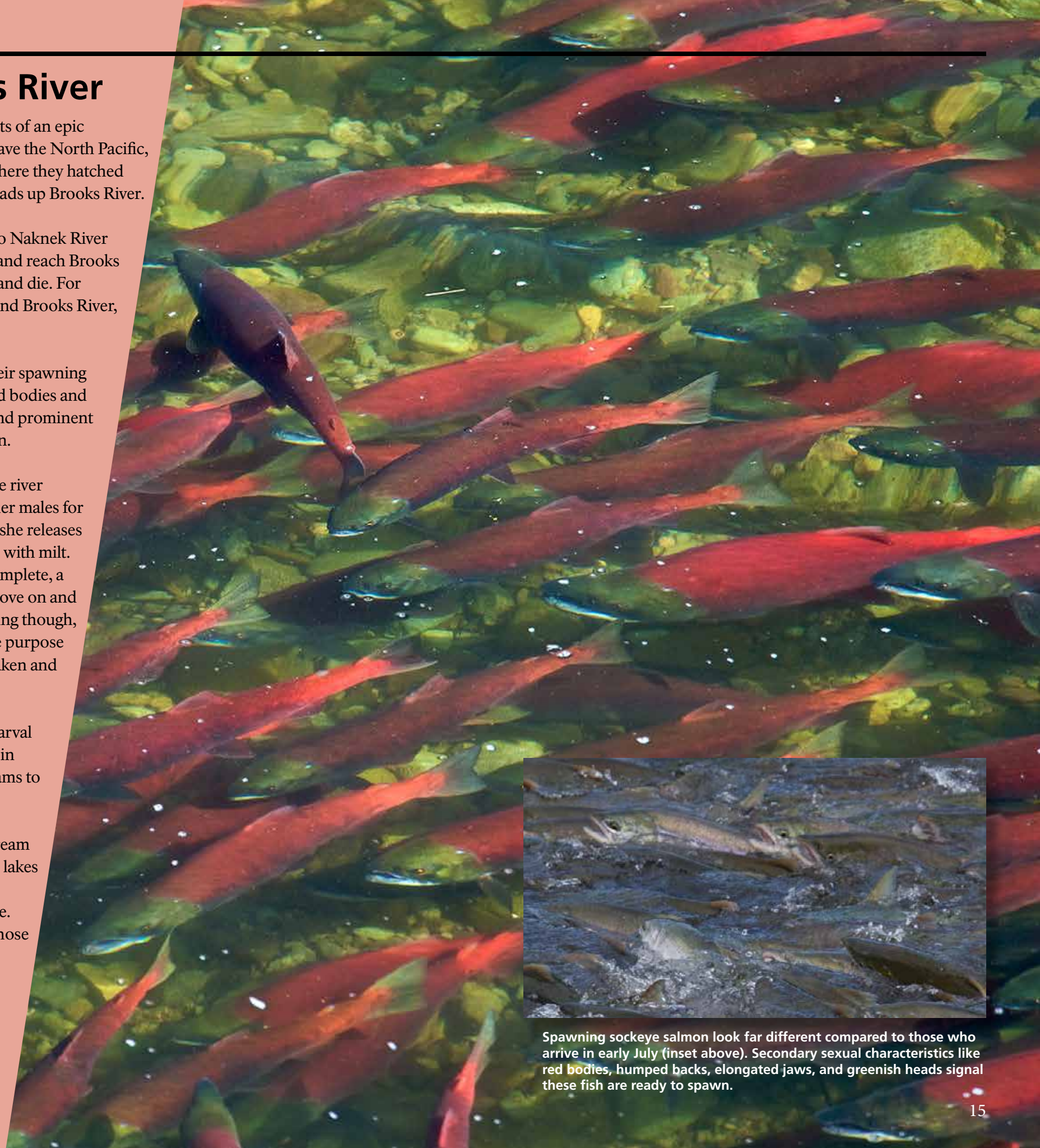
Near the summer solstice, sockeye salmon begin migrating into Naknek River from Bristol Bay. From there, salmon swim into Naknek Lake and reach Brooks River. This is the final stop for some fish; here they will spawn and die. For others, the voyage is not quite over. Their destination lies beyond Brooks River, in the small tributaries of Lake Brooks.

Sockeye salmon reach sexual maturity when they approach their spawning grounds. Their silver color disappears, replaced by red-colored bodies and green heads. They also attain humped backs, elongated jaws and prominent teeth. These features are especially pronounced in male salmon.

Using their tails, female sockeye excavate a series of nests in the river bottom. Males don't dig nests, but they viciously fight with other males for access to females. When a female judges a nest to be just right, she releases eggs in it. Simultaneously, the attending male fertilizes the eggs with milt. Then the female buries the eggs in gravel. Once spawning is complete, a female will defend her redd as long as she can. Male salmon move on and may attempt to fertilize the eggs of other females. After spawning though, salmon are on borrowed time. Spawned-out and with their life purpose complete, they will never return to the ocean. They slowly weaken and die.

Eggs incubate for about four months. After hatching, the tiny larval fish, called alevin, remain in the gravel until they emerge as fry in spring. When large enough, young salmon fry move from streams to lakes, where they stay for one to two years.

Salmon fry become smolt when they begin to migrate downstream to the ocean. Salmon smolt imprint on their natal streams and lakes while migrating to the ocean. Along this journey, they undergo many physiological changes to prepare for a saltwater existence. Salmon smolt are about to enter a totally new environment, whose conditions they cannot know until they get there. Substantial changes to the kidneys and gills are required for the fish to survive the harsh transition from freshwater to the salty ocean. Sockeye salmon feast in the North Pacific for two additional years. There they grow into the large and beautiful fish who return as adults to spawn.



Spawning sockeye salmon look far different compared to those who arrive in early July (inset above). Secondary sexual characteristics like red bodies, humped backs, elongated jaws, and greenish heads signal these fish are ready to spawn.

Katmai's Keystone

What makes salmon such interesting and charismatic creatures? Is it their importance to brown bears? Is it the commercial and recreational fishing opportunities they provide? Is it the promise of food through a long winter? What about their epic migrations and battle against the odds?

Of course, all of these things make them interesting and important. For a moment though, consider how salmon are important in other ways that might not be obvious. Salmon are conveyor belts of energy and nutrients. They are the keystone that turns impoverished land and water into productive and vibrant landscapes.

Salmon provide the energy necessary for bears to grow large and fat over the summer and fall. Katmai's bears are larger and achieve greater reproductive success compared to bears without salmon in their diet. In Katmai, most of a bear's yearly calories comes from salmon.

Salmon also provide food for dozens of other species, including fish and invertebrates. Many different fish species gorge on salmon fry and smolt in the spring and salmon eggs in the fall. Anglers often catch arctic char and rainbow trout with stomachs visibly distended with salmon eggs. In the winter, these fish may not eat much at all. They, like bears, are surviving on the energy brought to them by salmon.

Even decomposing salmon are vital to the ecosystem. Dead salmon provide tons of nitrogen and phosphorus that fertilize nutrient poor freshwater lakes and streams. These nutrients boost the primary productivity of plankton, which in turn feed salmon fry. Without this yearly boost, streams and lakes could not support high numbers of salmon fry. Riparian vegetation also grows quicker along salmon streams.

What would the loss of salmon mean for a place like Brooks River? Most people come to watch bears and fish for trophy-sized trout, grayling, and char. Without salmon, Brooks River would not be a world famous fishing destination, because there would be no large fish to catch. Without salmon, no one would visit Brooks Camp to see bears, because no bears would gather here. For thousands of years, people fished at Brooks Falls for salmon too. Even today, salmon are the heartbeat of the area's culture and economy. Without salmon, the economy of Bristol Bay and Southwest Alaska would collapse.

The survival of the modern day Katmai experience, the ecosystem as we've known it, and the history of Brooks River is intimately tied to these fish. They are, without doubt, Katmai's keystone species.



Dead salmon play a vital role in the productivity and abundance of Katmai's ecosystems.

Bear Safety at Brooks Camp

For many people, a trip to Brooks Camp is a once in-a-lifetime experience. To protect that experience for future generations, the National Park Service requires all arriving visitors to attend a 20 minute orientation and safety talk. This “bear school” teaches visitors how to behave in ways protecting both themselves and bears. While at Brooks Camp, you must:

- Keep an appropriate distance between yourself and bears: Stay at least 50 yards (~46 meters) away from all bears in the Brooks Camp area.
- Prevent bears from obtaining human food and garbage: At Brooks Camp, people are not allowed to carry or consume food and drinks (besides water) while outside, except in designated picnic areas.
- Prevent bears from associating human gear with play items: While at Brooks Camp, any items brought outdoors must be kept within arm’s reach at all times.
- Bears have the right of way: If you encounter a bear, you should give it the space it needs to continue fishing, walking, or sleeping. At times, bears may block access to areas such as the viewing platforms. Pack your patience and remember the bears’ freedom is what makes Brooks Camp an exciting destination.

By following these rules, we prevent bears from learning behaviors that will lead them into conflicts with humans. Please visit Katmai’s website for more information about staying safe in bear country.



How would you react towards an approaching bear? Special rules and regulations apply at Brooks Camp in order to better protect people and bears. Photo ©Jake Bortscheller.

To Name or Not to Name?

Bears at Brooks River are assigned numbers for monitoring, management, and identification purposes. Inevitably, some bears acquire nicknames from staff and these nicknames are included in this book, but naming wild animals is not without controversy. Is it appropriate to name wild animals?

Personnel at many bear watching areas in Alaska, like Brooks River, attach nicknames to frequently seen bears. These serve to help people identify, track, and manage the animals. However, names undoubtedly alter the way in which we relate to an animal. For some people, a named bear (or one with ear tags or a radio collar) may seem less wild, and more pet-like, than an unknown counterpart.

Names also carry meaning, intentionally or not. What stigmas would you attach to a young bear nicknamed Fluffy versus a large male bear named Killer? How would those stigmas alter your experience when watching that animal?

With those questions in mind, randomly assigned numbers are certainly more neutral than a name, but over time a number may lead to just as much anthropomorphizing as a nickname. No matter how we relate to these animals though, at Brooks River the bears with nicknames remain wild animals. Management decisions are never based on whether or not

a bear is named and the bears are completely unaware of the numbers and names assigned to them.

Explore this subject more and share your thoughts on Katmai's blog.

#130 was nicknamed Tundra when she was a yearling cub. What meanings are associated with that name? Does her nickname change the way you perceive her? Is it appropriate to name wild animals?



Bearcam! Watch Live Streaming Video of Brooks River and Its Famous Bears

Watch live footage of brown bears fishing for salmon anywhere with an internet connection. Katmai's bearcams are live, freely accessible, streaming webcams from Brooks River. Cameras are located at Brooks Falls, at the outlet of the Brooks River, near the summit of Dumpling Mountain, and even underwater. Don't miss a second of the action. Go to go.nps.gov/bearcam and follow the links to watch the world famous bearcams.

Join the Bearcam Community

Connect with the growing online community of Katmai and brown bear stewards. Discuss recent and past bearcam events with other fans, share your thoughts on national parks and wildlife conservation, and upload your favorite bearcam screenshots for others to enjoy.

On social media, use #bearcam and join the real-time chat at the bottom of any bearcam page on www.explore.org/bears. Post updates about bear activity on the river through the bearcam wiki page. Share your bearcam screen shots via the bearcam group on Flickr.

Ranger Live Chats

Throughout the year, rangers host live webcasts on the bearcams to discuss the biology, behavior, and ecology of bears and the salmon they depend on. Check the park's social media pages for upcoming live chats.

Explore.org

Funding for the installation, maintenance, and technical support for the bearcams is proudly provided by explore.org. Explore.org is a philanthropic organization with a mission to champion the selfless acts of others, create a portal into the soul of humanity, and inspire lifelong learning. Katmai was granted \$150,000 by explore.org to further fund educational efforts related to the bearcams.

Live streaming webcams capture the excitement and drama of a summer season along Brooks River. This image was taken from webcam footage.



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Chapter Three: Studying the Bears of Brooks River



A NPS biological technician scans for bears at the lower river.

Monitoring Bears at Brooks River

Bear watching at Brooks River is different than most other bear watching sites in Alaska, especially when you consider the depth of information collected about individual bears. Since 2001, biologists at Katmai have conducted in-depth monitoring sessions along Brooks River to record data on bear and human use of the area.

Over time, this information has grown into one of the most comprehensive data sets about bear use of a particular place ever recorded. Park managers can use this data to follow trends in bear numbers, how they interact with each other, and how humans impact their movement and behavior. This information provides park managers with the data necessary to make informed decisions about the management of the river. It also provides the public with a great deal of information and insight into the lives of these amazing animals.

How is data collected?

The river from Brooks Falls downstream to its mouth on Naknek Lake is divided into several observation zones for data collection. Sampling is conducted from the public viewing platforms at the falls and near the raised bridge, as well as from a tree stand in the cut bank area.

What data are collected?

Observation sessions are scheduled to produce balanced sampling by time of day and sample zone. Biologists collect a wide variety of information during bear monitoring sessions including the number of bears using the river; activity rates by age, sex, and individual; behavior of bears seen; bear “arrival” dates (i.e. the first date seen in July and fall monitoring seasons). Arrival and departure times are recorded for each individual bear seen during an observation session, and counts of people and behavior of each bear in view are recorded at 10 minute intervals. In addition, fish caught and time spent fishing is recorded for a subsample of the bears seen.

From year to year, records of identifying characteristics of individual bears are maintained, and each bear identified is assigned a unique identification number. The age (adult or subadult) and sex of each bear is also recorded. Age classification is a subjective determination, based primarily on size and behavior (and often on the documented identification history of the bear). Sex is determined by observation of urination, posture, genitalia, or presence of offspring. Photo records are maintained for as many different individuals as possible. The photo records are an important aspect of recognizing individual bears across seasons and years, particularly when several biologists are involved in data collection.



#856 eats his catch near Brooks Falls. A bear's fishing activity is just one of the many behaviors recorded by Katmai's staff.

How Many Bears Use Brooks River?

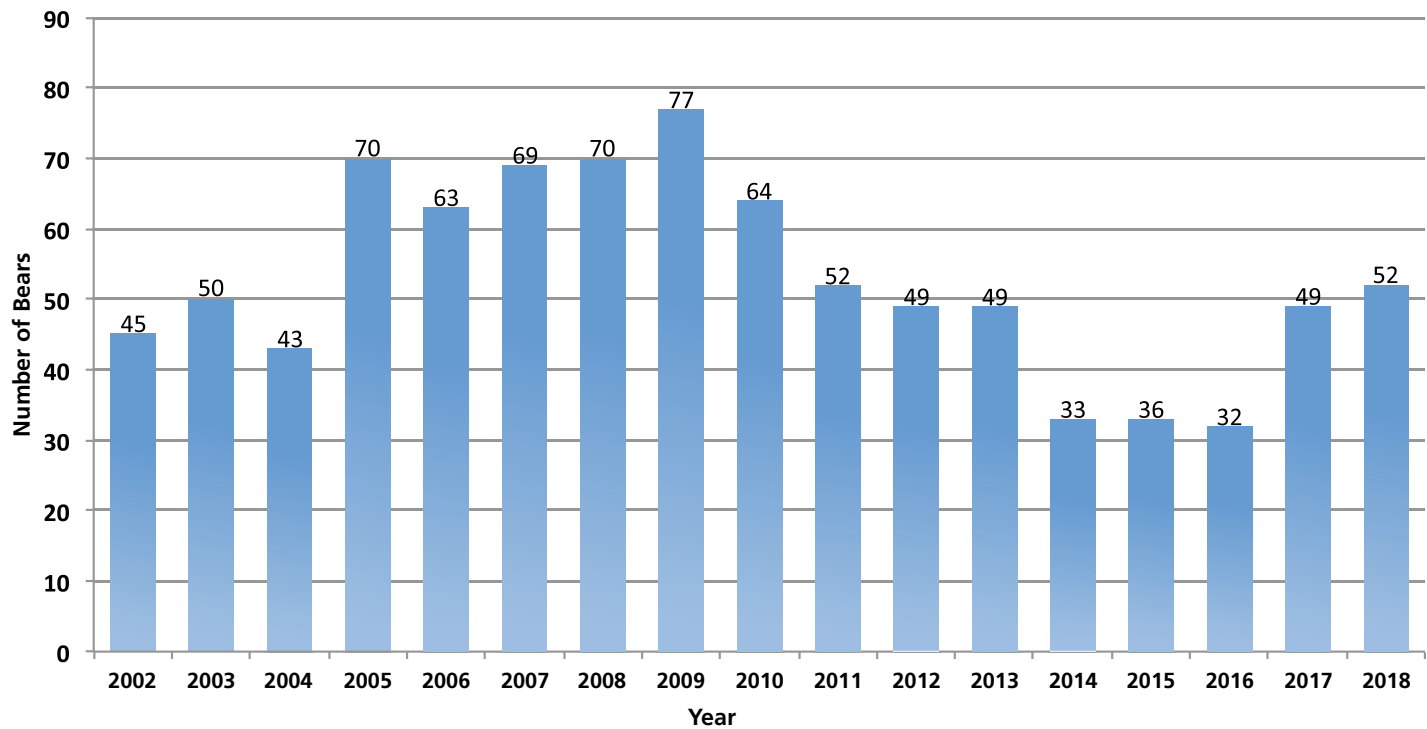
High numbers of bears at Brooks River may be a relatively new phenomenon in Katmai National Park’s recent history. Archeological excavations reveal evidence of extensive human use on the river for thousands of years. During much of this time, humans and bears directly competed for access to salmon. When humans gathered at Brooks Falls to fish, bears may have been displaced. After the establishment of Katmai National Monument in 1918, and especially after the monument was expanded to include the Brooks River area in 1931, bears were granted a high level of protection. Even so, anecdotal evidence suggests that Katmai’s bear population was at an ebb in the 1950s. Since then, the number of bears using Brooks River has greatly increased. Why?

Abundant salmon are likely the reason for this trend. Bear survival and productivity is directly linked to salmon. In the Naknek River watershed, which includes Brooks River, the 20 year average salmon escapement is 1.62 million fish (1996–2015). About 20% of the Naknek River’s salmon escapement migrate to Brooks River. Also, over the past 30 years, Katmai’s bear management policies have placed increasing emphasis on minimizing bear-human conflicts. Bear cubs that accompany their mothers to Brooks River typically experience relatively benign contacts with people. Thus, as these cubs grow into adults we would expect the number and proportion of adults tolerant of people to increase.

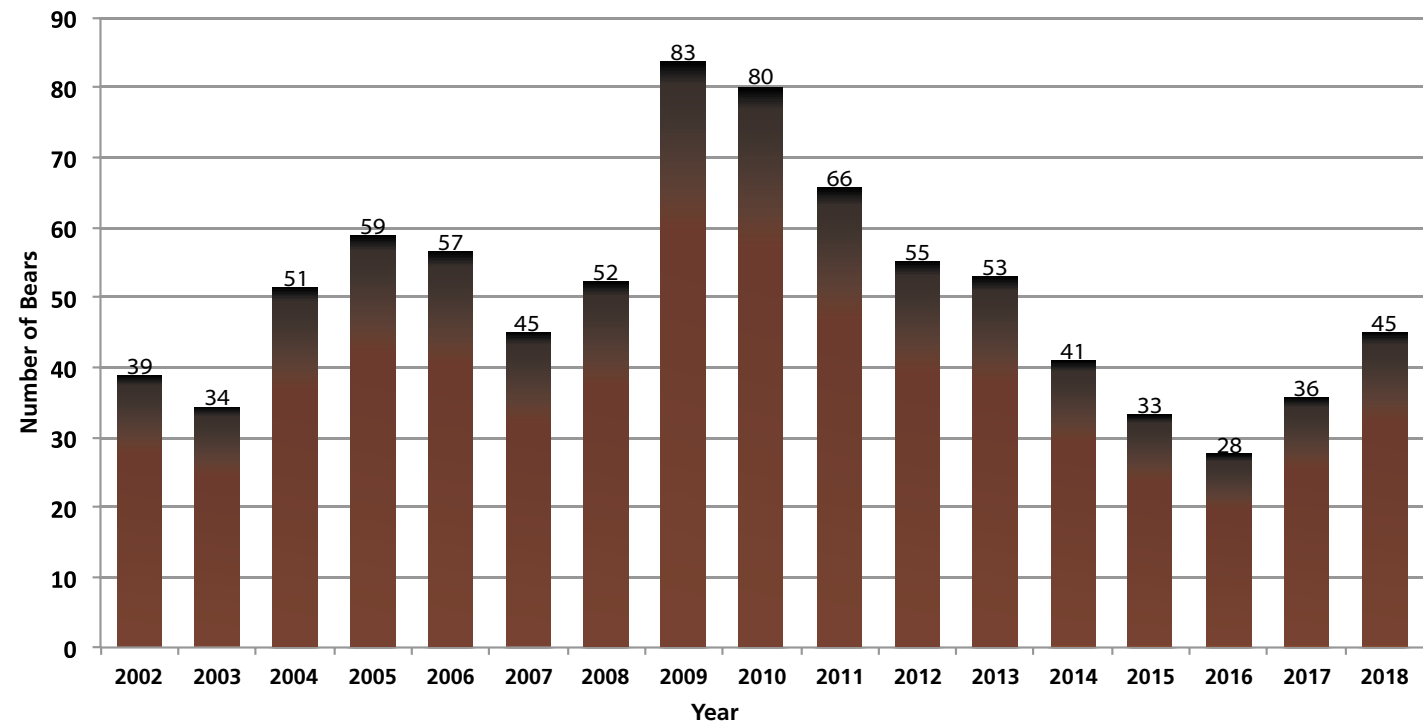
In the 1970s, very few bears used Brooks River in July (usually not more than 6-8 bears) while 25-40 bears used Brooks River in the fall during that same time, but in the 1980s, bears began to fish at Brooks Falls during July in ever increasing numbers. By the early 2000s, bear numbers in July surpassed bear numbers in the fall. For unknown reasons, bears took longer to learn to exploit salmon at Brooks River in July than in the fall. Bears numbers also differ from season to season. Brooks River is one of the first streams in Katmai where migrating salmon become accessible to bears (and the caloric value of bright pre-spawned salmon is exceptionally high). In contrast, spawning and spawned-out salmon are available at several streams during the fall.

How many bears use the river now? During late June through July, the annual cumulative total number of independent bears identified regularly using Brooks River during 2001-2017 has ranged from 33 to 77. During fall (September through early October), the annual cumulative total of bears has ranged from 33 to 83. Typically, another 5 to 10 transient bears are documented in each of the two monitoring periods annually. In 2018, 52 individual bears were identified in July and 45 in fall.

Bear Numbers in July



Bear Numbers in Fall



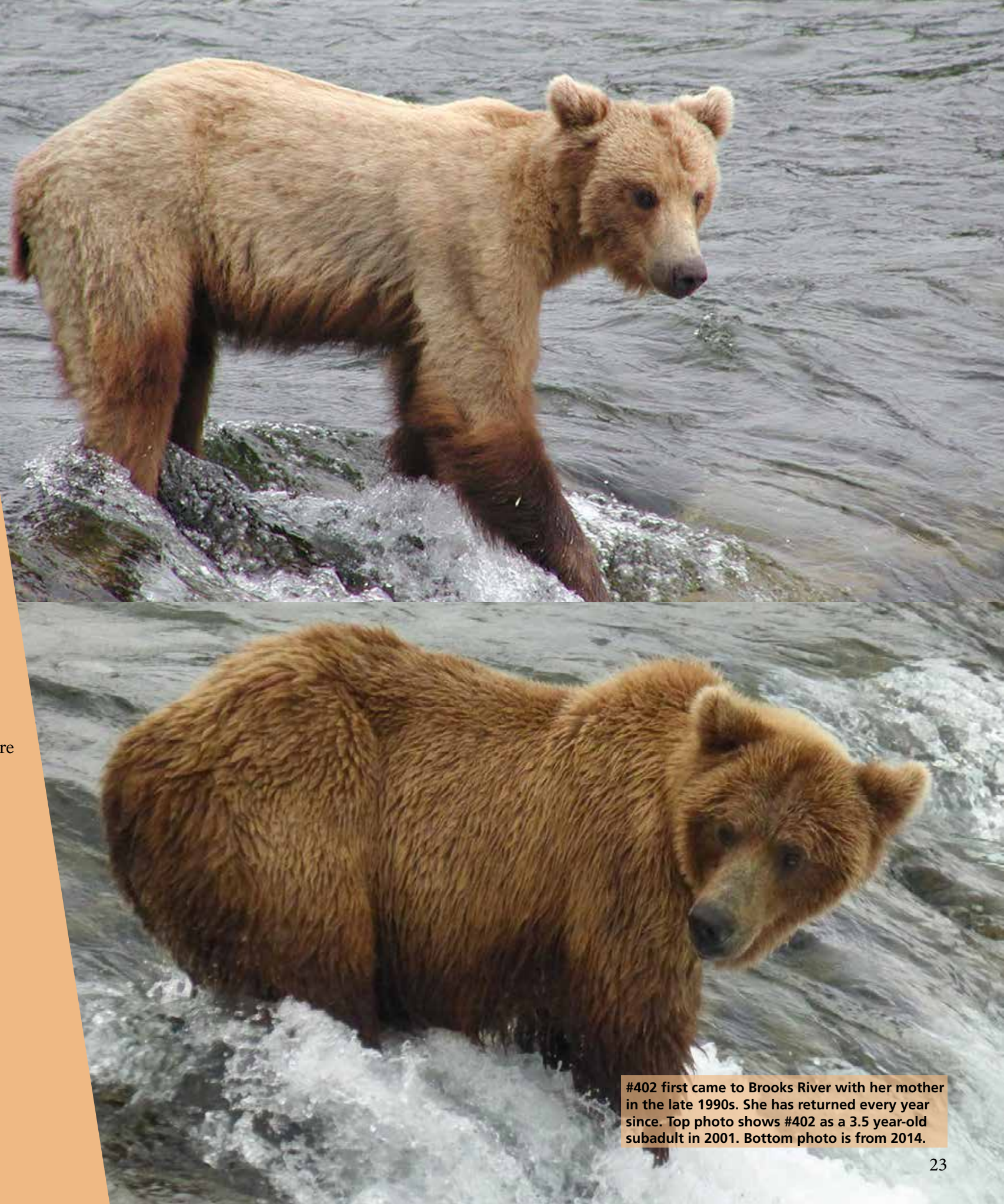
Do the Same Bears Return to Brooks River Each Year?

Bears are creatures of habit. Once they learn when and where food is available, they will return to those places again and again. Since Brooks River typically offers reliable access to salmon, many of the bears seen at Brooks River each year are recognized from prior years. Some bears visit the river every year their whole lives.

The majority of newly recognized bears are usually subadult bears who are establishing their own home ranges and experiencing life away from their mother for the first time. However, almost every year a few mature adult bears who are unknown to park staff visit the river. Some are transient; they stay for only short periods of time and are never seen again. Others are persuaded to stay and fish for salmon in subsequent years.

The “cast” of bears seen on the river each season is relatively consistent. For example, during 2007, an unusually active year with over 100 different bears, 50 of the 69 independent bears identified on the Brooks River in July were recognized from previous years. Similarly, 34 of the 45 independent bears identified during fall were recognized from previous seasons. Recognizing bears from year to year is difficult; therefore, these figures should be considered minimum estimates.

Each year, a number of bears are also recognized between the periods of July and fall bear use at Brooks River. However, it should be noted that recognizing bears between July and fall within a single year tends to be more difficult than recognizing animals across years within the the two periods.



#402 first came to Brooks River with her mother in the late 1990s. She has returned every year since. Top photo shows #402 as a 3.5 year-old subadult in 2001. Bottom photo is from 2014.

Predator and Prey at Brooks River

What might cause bear abundance to vary at Brooks River? This is a tale of predator and prey over years, months, and minutes. Comparing overall bear numbers with salmon escapement reveals a long term relationship. Escapement is the number of fish not captured by commercial fishing and migrating inland to spawn. The number of bears at Brooks River has risen and fallen over the past 15 years and seems to closely parallel a rise and decline in salmon abundance. Large runs of salmon support greater numbers of bears and increase reproduction rates. Like many predator-prey relationships though, predator numbers lag behind prey abundance.

Bear numbers can also be tracked over a month's time scale. Since the late 1990s, rangers at Brooks Falls have counted bears, salmon, and people at Brooks Falls. From late June to early August, staff record individual bears seen at the river near the falls and the number of people standing on the Brooks Falls wildlife viewing platform. Jumping salmon also are counted for one minute to document their relative abundance. This data is collected every half hour from approximately 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. When this data is compiled and tallied on a graph (Figure 1), a clear pattern of relative bear abundance emerges for July. The numbers of jumping salmon peak during the first two weeks of July. This reflects the peak of the sockeye salmon migration into Brooks River. Bear numbers increase steadily from late June and peak in the third week of July.

Bear numbers at Brooks Falls also vary considerably on a day to day, hour to hour, time scale. During extreme highs in salmon abundance, fish are so plentiful and easy to catch that many bears are satiated quickly. At these moments, bears spend less time fishing, because they get full and move out of the water to rest. When lesser numbers of salmon are seen at the falls, bears often spend more time fishing and more bears are seen. When you watch salmon and bears at Brooks Falls, look for these patterns to emerge. It's a real life drama of predator and prey.

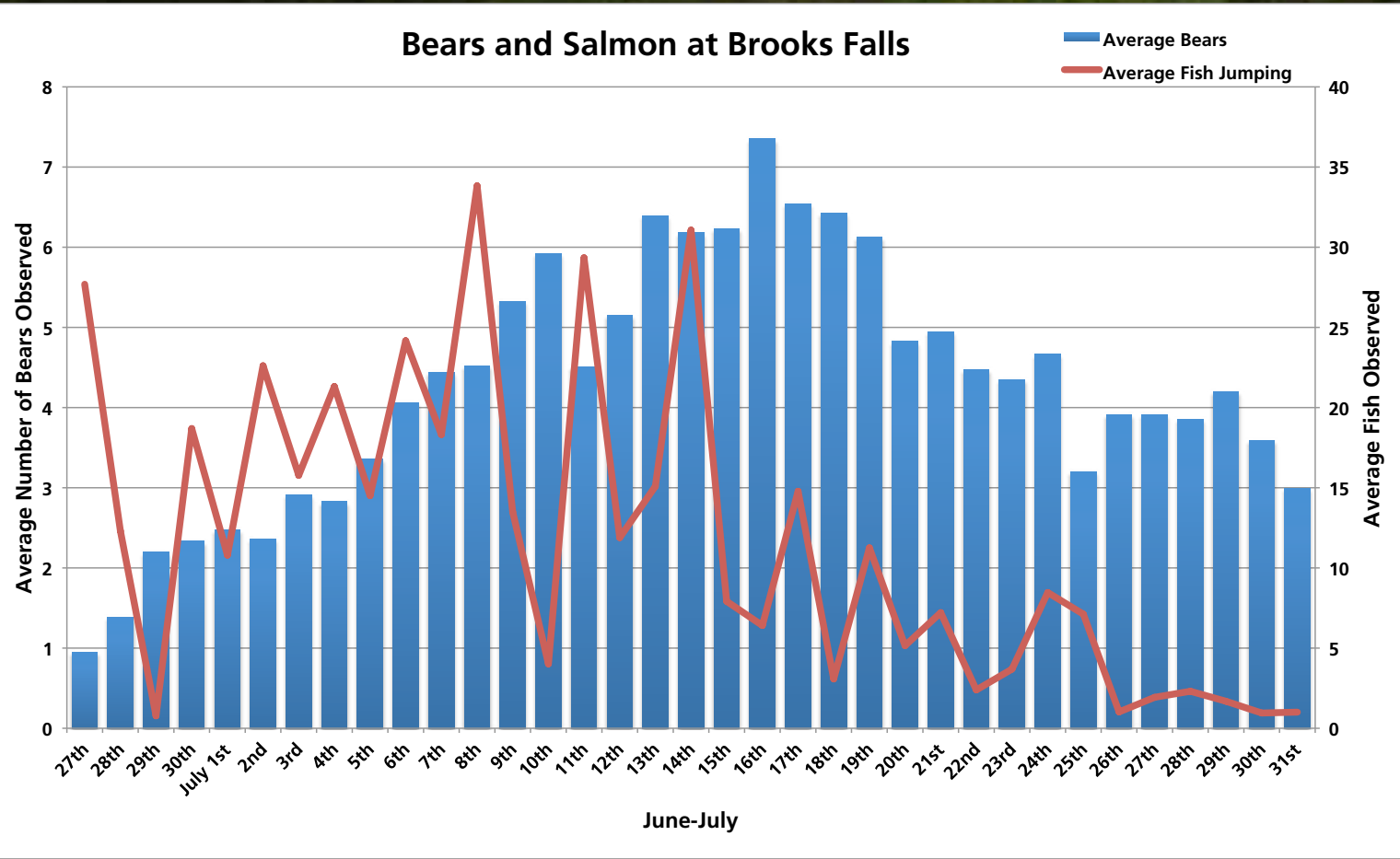
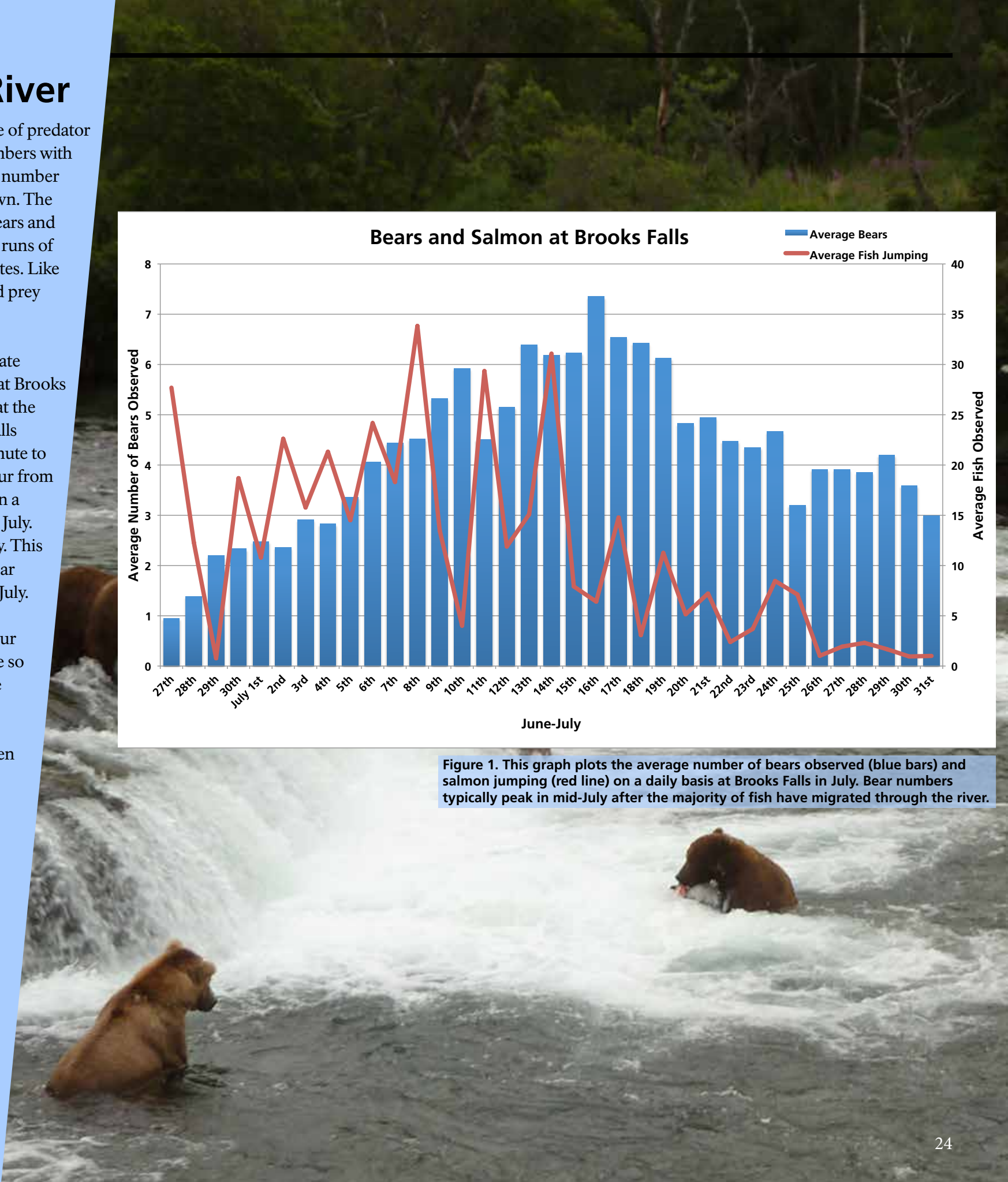


Figure 1. This graph plots the average number of bears observed (blue bars) and salmon jumping (red line) on a daily basis at Brooks Falls in July. Bear numbers typically peak in mid-July after the majority of fish have migrated through the river.



Sudden Deaths of Two Bears in 2015

In late October 2015 two bears, an adult male and a spring cub, died within one week at Brooks River. These deaths highlighted a major risk that all organisms face—infectious disease.

In Katmai, a place with some of the highest densities of bears anywhere in the world, rangers and biologists rarely see a bear die or find dead bears. Still, the information about the few recorded bear deaths can help us glean some knowledge about the end of a bear's life. During the past 36 years at Brooks River, only about 15 bear deaths have been documented. Almost all of these deaths were caused by other bears, but illness and disease will take its toll.

On October 21, 2015 bearcam viewers watched a mother bear (#451) and her two spring cubs. One of the cubs stumbled as it walked. The cub collapsed at the base of the viewing platform near one of the cams. For two and a half days, it remained there. #451 and her other cub remained nearby for most of this time before it died on October 23. The cub was collected for necropsy on Saturday, October 24.

A few hours after the dead cub was retrieved, webcam viewers noticed a large, brown, stationary object at the lake shore near where the cub died. It did not move in the following days. Due to its size, color, and location, park staff believed it was a dead bear. Since the possibility for a disease outbreak or human-caused deaths existed, park staff returned to Brooks River, conducted a gross field necropsy, and sent samples to a lab for further analysis. When they returned, they identified the bear as #868.

Results from a laboratory analysis indicate that the cub likely died from canine adenovirus type-I (CAV-1). This disease is also called canine infectious hepatitis. Infectious canine hepatitis is a viral disease found worldwide that primarily infects dogs, foxes, wolves, coyotes, and bears. A 1998 study documented about 10% of brown bears on the Alaska Peninsula had the antibodies that indicate they had contact with the virus. The tissue samples from the cub tested negative for rabies and canine distemper. Analysis was conducted by USGS staff at the National Wildlife Health Center (NWHC).

#868's cause of death is undetermined. No signs of outward trauma were visible on him, except for a broken nose (the nose could've have been broken when he collapsed to the ground). 10-12 gallons of fluid were present in his abdominal cavity, which is not a normal finding. #868 tested negative for CAV-1 and rabies. No parasites were observed in the tongue or abdominal cavity fluid. It *appears* that his death is unrelated to the cub's, but there is no evidence that he died from a sudden, traumatic injury. However, samples from 868 were decomposing rapidly by the time they reached the lab for analysis which prevent us from ever knowing his cause of death.

For more information on these deaths, to see photos of the field necropsy on #868 (some photos are graphic) and photos of the cub when it was collected, and delve into more information of other causes of bear mortality in Katmai, visit www.nps.gov.



Wildlife technicians examined #451's dead cub for visible signs of trauma before collecting it.



#868's body was examined and necropsied in the field. He was estimated to weigh 900 pounds.

Brown Bear Genetics Study

Brooks Camp offers a unique opportunity to scientists who want to learn about brown bears. It's one of the densest populations of wild bears anywhere in the world, and what's more, Brooks Camp is a developed space. Despite its remote location, the infrastructure for electricity, permanent housing, and the ability to resupply regularly make living with brown bears a reality.

Under these circumstances, wildlife biologists are poised to make some important discoveries about the world's largest land predators.

Why Study Genetics?

The primary goal of the Brown Bear Genetics Study is to evaluate gene flow between populations of bears in Brooks Camp and bear populations in nearby locations. The presence, or absence,

of shared genes in separate populations of bears will shed light on the extent of bear movements on the Alaska Peninsula. For instance, do the bears we see in Brooks Camp travel across the Aleutian Range? Brown bears are capable of traveling such distances, but we don't know the extent of their actual movements.

A secondary goal of the study is to determine a family tree of the bears in Brooks Camp. Through careful observation, Katmai's biologists have tracked some relationships between mother and offspring, but since male bears play no part in the rearing of cubs, paternal genetic lines have always been a mystery. The current study hopes to create a detailed genetic map of the Brooks Camp bears, and if repeated in following years, could reveal information about behavioral genetics in brown bears.

How is the Study Carried Out?

In order to evaluate genetic information, DNA samples must be taken from each bear involved in the study. To do this, biologists have implemented two separate modes of sample retrieval. The first is by using a hair snare. Barbed wire is placed on trees that have been scent marked, with the hope that a bear will return to rub on the tree again, leaving hair behind for the researchers. The second is by using a CO₂ powered dart gun. Biologists shoot a biopsy dart that is designed to fall out of the bear shortly after impact, retrieving a tissue sample and allowing the bear to carry on with its business, relatively undisturbed. Since the identity of each bear that is darted can be recorded, these samples will be available for use in the composition of a genetic map of Brooks Camp bears.

All samples taken from Brooks Camp will be compared to samples taken from bears on the coast of Katmai and from nearby bear populations located along the Alaska Peninsula. Depending on the level of shared genes between different populations, biologists can determine the extent of bears' movements in and around Katmai.

Researchers hope to analyze and publish the findings from this study by 2019. [Read more about the Brown Bear Genetics Study](#)



Ranger Jaime Gehring removes a hair sample from a hair snare.

Chapter 4: Cubs



#854's spring cub climbs along the bank of Brooks River.

Identification

Cubs are small, young bears dependent on an adult female. First year cubs are called spring cubs or cubs-of-the-year, and are generally very small with dark fur. They can sometimes have a natal collar, a band of lighter fur around their neck. Cubs in their second summer are called yearlings. Their coats are generally lighter than spring cubs, especially early in the summer.

Relative size can help differentiate between spring, yearling, and 2.5 year-old cubs. Overall, spring cubs are very small compared to their mothers. Yearling cubs are often taller than spring cubs, while 2.5 year-old bears can be nearly as large as their mother.

Life History

Cubs are born in the den in mid-winter. At this time they are hairless, blind, and only weigh about one pound (.45 kg). After birth, they nurse and grow rapidly until the mother emerges from the den in mid-spring. When they exit the den with their mother, they may weigh 12 pounds (5.5 kg) or more, but their rapid growth doesn't end there. By the fall, they may weigh 60 pounds (27.2 kg) or more—equivalent to 6000% of their birth weight just 10 months before!

Spring cubs are highly dependent on mother's milk during their first year. Cubs will nurse as long as they remain with their mother, although as cubs age they rely less and less on mother's milk for nutrition. Separation between mother and cub occurs in

the spring after the family exits the den. At that time, the mother bear pushes her offspring away, often aggressively. In the Katmai region, cubs typically remain with their mothers through 2-3 summers.

Cubs form strong, albeit temporary, social bonds with their siblings and mother. Cubs' playful demeanor often mask the risks they face. Mortality is very high within the Katmai region. As many as two-thirds of cubs will not survive their first year. Infanticide, drowning, illness, falling, and becoming lost are just some of the obstacles these young bears must overcome.

Why Aren't Cubs Numbered?

Bear cubs are just as interesting to watch as adult bears. They struggle, compete, they're charismatic, and undeniably charming. We can learn from and be inspired by cubs in the same ways we do from adult bears.

So if visitors and cam viewers watch cubs for all the same reasons that we watch adults, why are they treated differently in this book, and in the research conducted within the park? We do not assign numbers to dependent cubs, nor do we "count" them as individuals while monitoring bear activity on Brooks River.

Individual bear cubs are difficult to distinguish within and between litters, and change drastically from year to year. This makes accurate spring-time identification of returning cubs very difficult. The risk of misidentifying individual cubs is too high to conduct accurate monitoring of bears beginning in their first years.

The high mortality rate of young brown bears poses another challenge to monitoring them. As a species, nearly 50% of all brown bear spring cubs do not survive to adulthood. In Brooks Camp, that rate is even higher. As few as 33% of spring cubs survive to adulthood. That's because Brooks River is home to an exceptionally high density of bears. With more bears, competition for resources becomes more intense. There are more dominant males using the same small area, increasing the odds of infanticide.

Numbering, naming, and connecting emotionally with bear cubs is a risky undertaking. The chances of that cub surviving to adulthood are low, so we set ourselves up for heartbreak by becoming attached to them.

An exception to this practice was made in a previous version of this book with #503. He was abandoned, so was no longer dependent on his mother #402, but was later adopted by #435 Holly. The unusual set of circumstances made him a kind of "quasi-sub-adult," resulting in his inclusion in the 2015 Bears of Brooks River.

Since no similar situation has occurred since, the normal protocol for bear monitoring will carry on, and cubs will remain excluded from this book for identification purposes.



#435 Holly's spring cubs wait on shore while their mother fishes.

Chapter 5: Subadults



#719 glances down the trail.

Identification

Subadults are generally small to medium-sized bears. Like adolescent humans, subadults appear to have not yet grown into their body, which sometimes gives them the impression of having a big head and ears. Behaviorally, they can be recognized by their playful and inquisitive nature. You might see a subadult play-fighting, chasing a duck, or awkwardly attempting to fish. They are often skittish around larger adult bears.

Young adult females and large older cubs can sometimes be confused with subadults. Young adult females usually appear less

lanky and more filled-out. They will also behave more confidently than a subadult. Older cubs are accompanied by their mother, unlike an independent subadult.

Life History

Subadults are young brown bears between 2 to 5 years old. They are independent of their mothers but have not yet matured into adult bears.

The distinction between a subadult and an adult bear is somewhat arbitrary and is defined by reaching sexual maturity. Like humans, there is no set age when this happens, but it

generally occurs around the bear's sixth year. Until they reach maturity, subadults spend their time learning how to fit into the complex world of bears.

Because of their relatively small size and low position in the bear hierarchy, the subadult years are a difficult time in a bear's life. As the lowest members of the bear hierarchy, they are forced to yield space and food resources to larger adults. Subadults are relegated to the less than desirable fishing spots, and sometimes face predation by other bears.

Miscellaneous Subadults

2017 was a big year for newly emancipated subadult bears in the Brooks River area. A high number of bears left the care and supervision of their mothers to begin exploring the world on their own.

In 2016, six different sows had 1.5 year old cubs that appeared to survive until denning time. One additional sow, #132, raised a litter of three 2.5 year olds. Brown bears raise cubs to their second (or less often, to their third) year before emancipating them that spring. In total, there were nine cubs that were eligible to be emancipated during the spring and summer of 2017. That sizeable cohort joined eight existing subadult bears already known to use the Brooks River.

Individual subadult bears can be particularly difficult to identify consistently. In addition to the seasonal weight fluctuations that all bears experience, subadult bears are still growing rapidly and can change dramatically in appearance. They also are no longer attached to their mother or siblings, which usually makes family units easier to identify. Subadults also have a higher propensity to leave or move into given areas.

These young bears are still forming their identities. This is often the time in their lives when they disperse and find new territory.



July 2017



September 2017



September 2017

This bear is a small female subadult. She has a blond coat in summer that darkens to light brown in the fall. She has dark eye rings in July that remain to an extent in fall. Her muzzle is tapered and straight in profile.



September 2017



September 2017



September 2017

This small-bodied female has distinct light-tipped ears. Her muzzle is tapered to a point and slightly upturned. She is defensive around other bears and does not tolerate the presence of humans. She was seen scavenging fish along the cutbank and lower river in fall. She was not seen in official monitoring during July.



September 2017



September 2017



September 2017



August 2017

This male subadult is on the smaller side with a dark brown coat. His ears are round and match the color of his body. His muzzle is pointed and a lighter color than his coat. He received a large wound on his right rear hip in September. Though the wound was large, it did not appear to affect his mobility, and began to heal by the end of monitoring in October. The cause of the injury is unknown.

809

Year First Identified: 2.5 year-old Subadult in 2017

Identification

#809 is a small subadult male. He has dark blonde coat in the fall. His legs are short and darker than his body. He has triangular ears and an upturned, “smiling” muzzle.

Life History

#809 is believed to be the offspring of #273. He appears tolerant of other bears and of the presence of people. He was seen fishing at the cutbank, lower river, and farther out in the mouth of lower river and Naknek Lake. #809 was not seen in 2018.

Subadult Male



September 2017



September 2017



September 2017



September 2017



September 2017



September 2017

907

Year First Identified: 3.5 year-old Subadult in 2018

Identification

#907 is a medium-sized bear. He has a prominent shoulder hump and tan claws. He is often seen fishing mostly in the riffles area of the Brooks River.

Life History

#907 is the suspected offspring of #708 and sibling of #908. He emancipated in 2018 as a three year old. While it is more common for cubs to be emancipated in their second year, there are times when sows will not chase their cubs away until their third year.

Subadult Male



July 2018



July 2018



September 2018



September 2018

908

Year First Identified: 3.5 year-old Subadult in 2018

Identification

#908 is a medium-sized female. She has light colored claws and blonde triangular ears. #908 was seen fishing mostly along the lower river up to the riffles.

Life History

#908 is a suspected offspring of #708 and sibling of #907. She was emancipated in 2018 as a three year old.

Subadult Female



July 2018



July 2018



September 2018



September 2018

909

Year First Identified: 2.5 year-old Subadult in 2018

Identification

#909 is a small subadult female. She has large blonde flopped over ears. She was often seen with sibling #910. She seems to have developed a “dash-and-grab” technique for fishing. #909 fished along the entire stretch of the river.

Life History

#908 is a suspected offspring of #409.

Subadult Female



July 2018



July 2018



September 2018



September 2018

910

Year First Identified: 2.5 year-old Subadult in 2018

Identification

#910 is a small subadult female. She has darker more rounded ears than her sibling. She is often seen with #909 playing or fishing throughout the river. #910 had a limp last summer but appeared healed by fall.

Life History

#910 is a suspected offspring of #409.

Subadult Female



July 2018



July 2018



September 2018



September 2018

Chapter 5: Adult Females



Identification

Adult female bears, like their male counterparts, have bodies that look filled in, their heads appear smaller in proportion to their bodies, and their ears are generally wide-set. Genitalia is usually difficult to see on female bears, but you can still sex adult females by watching them urinate. Females will urinate backward between their hind legs.

Male bears usually carry more scars and wounds than females, but scarring or wounds concentrated on the back of a bear's neck can occasionally be an identifier of females. These scars can

be the result of male bears biting them during copulation. The presence of cubs is an absolute indicator that you are looking at a female. Male bears play no role in raising young.

Life History

Adult females, or sows, generally weigh one-half to three-quarters as much as males, but can still grow to weigh between 300-600 pounds (136-272 kg) or more at maturity.

In the Katmai region, female bears generally reach sexual maturity around six years of age, but they may not produce their first litter until several years later. Mating takes place in late spring

and early summer. However, fertilized embryos will not implant in the uterus until a female dens for the winter. This delayed implantation is a remarkable adaptation which allows the female to give birth in the den—a place where the vulnerable newborn cubs are most protected. A female may have no offspring at all if her body didn't receive the nutrition it needs over the course of the summer and fall.

In the Katmai region, females typically keep their cubs through two summers, and less commonly through three summers.

39

Year First Identified: Subadult in 2007

Number of known litters: 2

Identification

#39 is a medium-small female. She has large ears, a dark blonde coat with a darker face and legs, and a slight v-pattern on her forehead. Her eyes have occasionally appeared sunken when seen. In the fall, she has a grizzled, dark blond coat and her ears look smaller than earlier in the summer.

Life History

Early in the summer, #39 would visit Brooks Falls, but usually had a low success rate in that area. She appeared to be wary of people and other bears, especially when she was caring for a cub in 2011 and 2012.

In 2017, #39 returned to Brooks River with three yearling cubs. Though she appears to have avoided Brooks River while caring for her cubs in 2016, she was seen frequently in 2017, and in all areas of the river. #39 often fished at Brooks Falls with all three of her cubs during July and August. In the fall, she frequented the lower river and cutbank. #39 was seen inn 2018.

Previously, this bear was misnumbered as bear #153. They are now thought to be the same bear.

Adult Female



July 2012



September 2017



Fall 2012



July 2017



July 2012



September 2014



July 2010

Year First Identified: Adult in 2008

Number of Known Litters: 3

Identification:

#94 is a medium-large adult female with a uniform medium-brown coat, a slightly tapered muzzle that turns up at the nose, dark eye rings, and spade-shaped, proportionally large ears. In the fall, her coat is darker, but still appears uniformly brown. She is often very fat later in the year. She will often sit on rocks at Brooks Falls in July.

Life History

When #94 was identified in 2008, she arrived at Brooks Camp with three spring cubs. That year, she frequently fished in the river near the old floating bridge, even with large groups of people present. Since then, #94 is often seen fishing at Brooks Falls and the riffles in July and in the fall at the river mouth in the lake.

In July 2011 she was courted by #856. Courting is a process through which adult males habituate adult females to their presence before mating. During this courtship the pair spent extensive time along Brooks River's north bank, in the area between the Cultural Site Trail and Brooks Falls. As #856's consort, #94 approached the falls much closer than she would have as a single bear.

During 2011 she mated with at least four males: #45, #218, #747, and #856. However, she had no cubs with her when first seen in 2012, nor did she have cubs in 2013 or 2014. Whether she lost cubs, or simply failed to give birth, is unknown. However, she returned to Brooks River with two spring cubs in September 2015. By the end of 2016, only one yearling cub remained.

Though only identified in the fall of 2016, #94 made regular appearances at Brooks River throughout the year in 2017. In the summer she sported a large wound on her left rear hip. By fall, the wound had mostly healed.

In 2018, #94 returned to the Brooks River with three spring cubs. They remained with her throughout the season and were often seen on the lower river all the way into late October. We'll watch to see if they all return with her in 2019.



October 2016



October 2016



July 2017



July 2017



July 2014



July 2017



September 2017

128 Grazer

Year First Identified: 4.5 year-old subadult in 2009
Number of Known Litters: 1

Identification

#128 is a medium to large adult female with a blond to light blond coat and dark patches around her eyes. She has a Roman nose and her large, oval-shaped, and widely spaced ears are very distinctive. In the fall, her coat darkens to dark blond, but her ears remain light blond.

Life History

#128 is believed to be the offspring of #408. She was part of a litter of three cubs that #408 kept for three summers from 2005 to 2007. She uses Brooks River in July, but like most females she typically cannot compete with male bears for prime fishing spots. Recently, #128 became one of the most skilled bears to fish the lip of Brooks Falls. In the fall, she will fish the lower river area, cut bank, and riffles.

#128 is another bear who has learned to associate people with fish. This is a behavior shared with other bears like #438 and #854. She is relatively habituated to people and will rapidly approach anglers who have a fish on the line. Anglers should give this bear extra space in the river and stop fishing well before she is within 50 yards (46 m).

In early July 2016, #128 returned to Brooks River with three spring cubs. While fishing the falls, #128 initially avoided fishing the lip, instead opting to “dash-and-grab” around the area closest to the falls platform. Later in July, #128 began to occasionally fish the lip, but remained wary of other bears in proximity to her cubs.

#128 proved to be remarkably protective of her first litter. She was seen chasing off and attacking several other females and dominant males who approached too closely. Her aggressive approach paid off as #128 kept all three cubs healthy through the end of 2017. In early 2018, she returned with and then emancipated her three cubs. The largest of the three possibly emancipated itself, as it was seen fishing on its own in the lower river while #128 was seen with the other two. The two smaller cubs now have their own numbers, #902 and #903.

Adult Female



July 2017



September 2017



July 2017



September 2017



July 2016



#128 (left) as a 2.5 year-old with #408.



July 2017

132

Year First Identified: 4.5 year-old subadult in 2009
Number of Known Litters: 2

Identification

#132 is a large female. In early summer, her coat is dark blonde to light brown and shaggy. In the fall, her coat is brown with some grizzled fur on her head and shoulders. Her ears are faintly light tipped and lean slightly forward. Her face is distinguished from other bears by the inverted V or chevron pattern of fur on her forehead.

Life History

Like #171, this bear was a frequent user of Brooks River for many years, yet didn't attract much attention from bear watchers until she returned in the fall of 2014 with three cubs in tow.

Until she arrived at Brooks River with cubs, she appeared to be somewhat habituated to people and would often walk by anglers in the lower river. Her behavior was noticeably different with cubs. Instead of tolerating people, she often avoided them. Bears possess the ability to change their behavior to best fit the circumstances. In this case #132 may have altered her behavior, because she viewed people as a potential threat or competitor.

By the end of 2016, all three of her 2.5 years old cubs were seen frequenting the lower river with her, fishing and often pushing other bears away. Cubs are often emancipated at 2.5 years, but keeping them for an additional summer may have given #132 an advantage—given the size of her cubs, the family “gang” was a force to be reckoned with. Other bears often yielded space to the group, resulting in uninhibited fishing access. In 2017, #132 returned to fish Brooks River on her own, presumably after emancipating her three cubs.

One of the most poignant stories of the 2018 season involved bear #132. She returned in June with two spring cubs. On July 3, bear #634 was being chased by bear #856 and as they approached the Riffles Platform ran into #132's family. In the process one of #132's cubs was killed. A painful reminder, especially to the witnesses present, that these animals are wild. After a brief separation, #132 and her second cub were reunited and continued to be seen along the river into late October.

Adult Female



July 2017



September 2017



July 2016



September 2016



July 2015



July 2010



September 2017

171

Year First Identified: Subadult in 2009

Number of Known Litters: 2

Identification

#171 is a medium-sized female with widely spaced, somewhat triangular shaped ears, a “smiling” gape, and a prominent brow ridge. In July, her coat is dark blond. In fall, her coat is more brown and grizzled. Her legs are typically darker than her back and face.

Life History

This bear has been seen using Brooks River every fall since 2009, but she only sporadically uses the river in July. She seems tolerant of people on wildlife viewing platforms, yet she appears to avoid people in other locations. #171 often avoids other bears and is not tolerant of their approach.

In July 2014, she returned to Brooks River with two small spring cubs. When she was last seen in the fall, she only had one cub. In 2015, no cubs remained from this litter. This was #171's first documented litter. No one knows why this bear's cubs disappeared, but it is not uncommon for bear cubs to die from a myriad of circumstances.

In July 2016, #171 again returned to Brooks River, this time with three spring cubs in tow. She was most often observed fishing along the cut bank with her cubs treed on shore. Unlike some other bears, #171 was not seen consistently throughout the summer or fall. Little is known about the movements of wild brown bears, and we see only a glimpse of their lives while they fish the Brooks River. Research projects like the Brown Bear Genetics Study and the Changing Tides Project aim to tell us more about the lives and movements of bears like #171.

#171 returned to Brooks River in July and fall of 2017. She initially had all three yearling cubs, but was soon after seen with only two. Both these yearlings were very small, and often treed themselves in the presence of other bears. She returned to the river again in 2018 without cubs. Whether the cubs were emancipated before she returned to the river we don't know.

Adult Female



July 2017



September 2015



July 2014



September 2017



July 2011



July 2017



September 2017

261

Year First Identified: 2.5 year-old subadult in 2010
Number of Known Litters: 0

Identification

#261 is a medium-large bear with a grizzled dark blond coat that darkens to brown in the fall. Her neck is shaggy and her ears are light tipped and triangular. She has a semi-prominent shoulder hump, lacks a prominent brow, and has a flat, wide forehead. She has a dark face, particularly around her eyes. During the summer months, a small scar is visible above her tail.

Life History

#261 has been observed using Brooks River every year in the fall since 2010. She is the offspring of #477. Having no known litters and fishing primarily in the cut bank area, this bear often goes unnoticed by bear viewers.

In 2016, #261 arrived at Brooks River for the first time in early July. We cannot know the motive for her change in behavior, but her ability to be flexible and modify her seasonal movements is one example of why brown bears are such a successful species.

#261 fished all areas of Brooks River during summer and fall, using mostly the “dash-and-grab” technique. She was seen occasionally playing with #503.

#261 was seen in July of 2017 and again in July and fall of 2018. She has never been seen with cubs. This could be because she has not yet had cubs or because she has had them and lost them before she was seen at the river.

Adult Female



July 2017



September 2016



July 2017



September 2016



July 2017



September 2016



September 2016

273

Year First Identified: Older subadult in 2011

Number of Known Litters: 1

Identification

#273 is medium-sized female with a blonde, shaggy coat and darker legs. Her ears are large and round. She has a furry face and a large “goatee” in the summer. Her eyes are closely set with dark eye rings. In the fall, her coat is light brown.

Life History

#273 returned to Brooks River in July 2015 with one spring cub. She proved to be an attentive, playful mother and her cub mimicked her behavior closely. The antics of mother and cub quickly captured the attention of bear watchers at Brooks Camp and on the bearcams. In July, she often fished downstream of Brooks Falls near the island and in the riffles. #273 also frequently fishes in the lower Brooks River.

For several years, #273 seemed to show little curiosity towards human buildings or gear, but that changed in 2015 when she damaged several structures at Brooks Camp. Bears are curious creatures that often investigate strange and novel objects. Human habituated bears, like #273, are more likely to find and explore human buildings and equipment, often damaging them in the process.

Brooks Camp’s location—in habitat that attracts and harbors bears—creates a high likelihood for conflict between people and bears. While #273’s behavior was unwelcome, she was simply expressing her curiosity and playfulness. Special regulations apply to Brooks River to help reduce the risk of bear and human conflicts. It is not possible or appropriate to manage the curiosity out of bears, but we can alter our behavior to reduce the chances that bears will express their curiosity on human property. When you visit Brooks Camp, be sure to give bears adequate space and do not leave anything unattended.

(Previous versions of this book noted that this bear was not seen in the fall, but bear monitoring staff now believe she was misidentified in the fall as #256.)

Adult Female



July 2016



September 2015



July 2017



September 2017



July 2017



July 2012



#256 in September 2012

284

Year First Identified: 3.5 year-old subadult in 2011
Number of Known Litters: 1

Identification

#284 is a medium-sized adult with a uniformly dark blond or medium-brown coat in July. In the fall, her coat is brown and very grizzled. She has a very prominent shoulder hump and a tapered muzzle. #284 looks remarkably similar to #708, who is her mother.

Life History

As a subadult, #284 was curious and explored the world around her through play. People watched her dig holes, bounce on fallen trees, slide down the river bank, and balance pumice on her nose. Her behavior has been described as erratic and even “crazy,” but these terms are not accurate descriptors. #284’s behavior was typical of many subadult bears who are still learning and exploring their world.

#284 should be given extra space. Despite growing up in the Brooks River area and often encountering humans, she has hop-charged people on several occasions. #284 also seems to pay extra attention to anglers. Suggesting that she may have gotten fish from people in the past and now associates the two.

In 2016, #284 returned to Brooks River with her first litter, two spring cubs. The family was seen fishing the riffles, cut bank, and lower river area. #284 often stood on her hind legs while fishing, likely an attempt to monitor the proximity of other bears and people to her vulnerable cubs. She continued to raise both cubs through 2017. She remained defensive around humans, hop-charging bear management staff several times throughout the season.

In 2018, #284 returned. One of her offspring was also seen using the river. That bear received its own number, #901.

Adult Female



June 2017



September 2017



July 2017



September 2017



#284 as a subadult in July 2012



#284 as a subadult in September 2011



July 2014

402

Year First Identified: 3.5 year-old subadult in 2001
Number of Known Litters: 7

Identification

A large female, #402 has a short, dark blonde or brown coat. Her face is crescent shaped with a straight profile and her ears are oval or slightly triangular in shape and erect. In July, she often has long fur under her muzzle that resembles a goatee. During the fall months, her fur is brown and grizzled.

Life History

#402 is often seen at Brooks Falls in July where she fishes the lip of the falls and will sometimes dive for salmon in the jacuzzi. She is among the few females who will fish at Brooks Falls with spring cubs. In fall, she often fishes the lower Brooks River and the lake.

#402 has had seven known litters. In 2007, she arrived at Brooks River with a single spring cub, but soon lost it. If females lose their cubs early in the year, they may mate and produce cubs the next summer. This happened to #402, because in 2008 she returned to Brooks River with three spring cubs.

In July 2011, after a prolonged confrontation with #856, #402 and her smallest cub became separated. During this time the cub was completely defenseless. #856 later returned and killed the cub.

In June 2014, #402 returned to Brooks River with one cub remaining from her 2013 litter. This cub, now a yearling, was separated from #402 for extended periods of time and was eventually abandoned while #856 courted and mated with #402 in July of that year. The yearling was eventually adopted by #435. To the surprise of many, #402 returned to Brooks River in 2015 with four new cubs. In early summer 2016, #402 returned with three of her cubs, now yearlings. Within a few weeks another cub was lost. #402 continued to raise her two remaining cubs through the fall of 2016. They were last seen as a family group in spring 2017.

In 2018, #402 arrived with her seventh litter—again with four spring cubs. They were all still with her in late October. She often fishes in the lower river and Naknek Lake.

Adult Female



July 2017



September 2017



July 2017



September 2017



July 2004



#402 as a subadult in June 2002



September 2014

409 Beadnose

Year First Identified: Subadult in 1999

Number of Known Litters: 4

Identification

#409 has a long, straight muzzle with a slightly upturned nose and a large body. She has a light to medium brown coat with wide-set, blond ears. In the fall, she is often very fat and her coat is a uniform brown, but her ears remain very blond.

Life History

#409 is frequently seen along Brooks River in July and in the fall. Like #410, she appears habituated to the presence of humans and will use areas near people to rest, travel, and feed. At Brooks River, she can fish successfully in many places such as the lip and far pool at Brooks Falls as well as the river mouth.

#409 had her first known litter of one cub in 2004, and she could be seen with the cub latched onto her back as she swam across the river. She returned in June 2007 with three spring cubs, but was soon observed with only two cubs. She raised the two survivors through 2008. One bear from this litter was recognized as #130.

When she is not raising cubs, this bear is usually one of the fattest females in the fall. Raising offspring is very energetically taxing for bears. Females with offspring must sacrifice body fat to raise cubs. #409, in recent years, has been able to devote more energy to her own survival as her overall size indicates.

In 2012, she returned with three spring cubs. This was her third known litter. She had weaned those cubs by 2014. #500 is likely a bear from the 2012 litter.

#409 returned to Brooks River in 2016 with her fourth litter—two spring cubs. She returned in 2017 with both cubs, then yearlings, and raised them through the fall.

In 2018, #409 emancipated both of her cubs and they were sometimes seen close to her at the falls. They were seen getting an occasional fish from her, and occasionally being chased away by her. While there is not yet DNA evidence, it is believed that by the end of the season both cubs, now subadults, received their own numbers, #909 and #910.

Adult Female



July 2017



September 2017



July 2017



September 2017



July 2010



September 2016



October 2002

410

Year First Identified: Spring cub in 1989

Number of Known Litters: 4

Identification

#410 is a large adult female. Early in the summer, her coat is light to medium-brown and often shaggy. Her fall coat is darker and grizzled. She has a recognizable dish-shaped face, a droopy lower lip, and prominent muzzle. Her claws are dark and she lacks distinctive scars.

Life History

#410 is one of the oldest and largest females frequenting the Brooks River and she fishes almost anywhere. She has been observed fishing in Naknek Lake, the lower Brooks River, and both above and below the falls.

She is arguably the most human-habituated bear to be found using the Brooks River, even while caring for cubs. #410 has been observed with people and heavy equipment operating within 15 meters. She will sleep on the trail near the bridge, on the beach near the visitor center and lodge, and in front of or underneath the wildlife viewing platforms.

Habituation is simply defined as getting used to something. Human-habituated bears are accustomed to our presence and often tolerate our close proximity. This gives us remarkable opportunities to observe them, but these bears should not be considered tame or safe to be near. Consider if a bear does react defensively and we are too close, we will have less time and space to react. Also human-habituated bears are more likely to obtain food and play rewards (unattended equipment) from people if we are not careful (see #273).

While #410 was seen in June and late fall of 2017, she was seen only once in 2018, in early July. She never put in a fall appearance as she has often done.

Bears do change their habits. It's possible that #410 found another creek with abundant salmon and she did not need to return to the Brooks River this fall. It's also possible that at her age she has completed the cycle of life and returned to the forest floor. Certainly people will be watching closely for her possible return in the summer of 2019. Will she be seen?

Adult Female



July 2017



September 2017



July 2017



September 2016



July 2014



July 2012



September 2016

435 Holly

Year First Identified: Young adult or older subadult in 2001

Number of Known Litters: 4

Identification

#435 is a medium-sized bear with a distinctive light blonde coat in early summer. In fall, her coat darkens and can be described as the color of a toasted marshmallow. Her ears are large and very blond. She has a dish-shaped face, a short muzzle, and tan colored claws. Her dark eye rings are distinctive early in the summer.

Life History

#435 is one of the most recognizable bears to use Brooks River. She is the mother of #89, who she successfully weaned despite #89's injured leg when he was a yearling. However, not all of her attempts to raise cubs have been successful. In 2009, she returned to Brooks River with one spring cub, but this cub was killed by #814.

In 2014, #435 again returned to Brooks River with one spring cub. By September, she became one of Brooks River's most famous bears when she adopted #402's abandoned yearling. In 2015, the mixed family returned to Brooks River and were seen together in October. Adoption of cubs by bears is very rare. Bears are generally selfish creatures who are not known for displays of altruism, so why would #435 Holly adopt the yearling?

Some biologists hypothesize that altruism evolved in some animals as a result of shared genes. If costs to your own fitness are not too great, it would make sense for you to care for your siblings and their offspring because you share genes with them, genes that will be passed on when they reproduce. However, #402, the abandoned yearling's mother and #435 Holly are not known to be related. Another cub in the family may also reduce the risk that #435's biological cub could fall victim to predation. We will never know why #435 became an adoptive mother, which makes the event even more intriguing.

#435 returned to Brooks River in July 2017 with two spring cubs. She often treed her cubs near the Brooks Camp Visitor Center in response to the presence of other bears. Both cubs were seen with her all summer and fall of 2018. They are both females.

Adult Female



July 2017



September 2016



July 2017



September 2017



July 2012



#435 as a subadult in June 2003



#435 (center) with her adopted yearling in 2014

451

Year First Identified: Young adult in 2013

Number of Known Litters: 3

Identification

#451 is a medium-small adult bear. In July, she has a light brown coat. In the fall her coat is uniformly brown. Her muzzle is long and lighter in color than her face. In previous years, she was identifiable by a persistent limp of her right rear leg.

Life History

Since 2013, this bear persisted through the disability caused by her injured rear leg or foot. No one witnessed how she was injured, but it happened sometime between July and September 2014. #451 limped but she still chased fish in the river and looked relatively healthy in the fall of 2015.

Despite her leg injury, #451 was raising three spring cubs when she was first seen in September 2015. One of these cubs disappeared due to unknown circumstances. The others appeared healthy until late October when one cub stumbled and collapsed near the mouth of Brooks River. For the next two days, it lay nearly motionless before dying.

During this time, #451 and her other cub remained close by, only taking short trips to the river to fish. #451 demonstrated strong maternal instincts—persistence, patience, defensiveness. It was only after the cub was collected for necropsy by wildlife technicians did #451 and her surviving cub move on.

[View photos of the cub when it was collected.](#)

[Read more detailed information about the cub's death.](#)

In summer 2017, #451 returned to Brooks River with three spring cubs. She appeared healthy and walked without a limp throughout the season. She raised all three cubs through the fall, mainly fishing at the top of the lower river area. She appeared wary of other bears and people.

These three cubs remained with #451 throughout the season of 2018. They were seen consistently throughout the summer and into October.

Adult Female



July 2017



September 2017



July 2014



September 2017



July 2013



#451 rests near her sick cub September 2015.



#451's injured leg in September 2013

477 Sara

Year First Identified: Adult in 2001

Number of Known Litters: 4

Identification

#477 is a medium-sized adult female bear with light colored, oval shaped ears and long, distinctive white claws. In July, her coat is light brown or dark blond. In the fall, her coat is more uniformly brown. She has a long, straight snout and a droopy lower lip.

Life History

Since 2001, this bear sporadically visited Brooks River. Some years she uses the river in July and in the fall. In other years, she is only seen in one season but not the other or not at all. In July, she will fish at the riffles and the cut bank. During fall, she fishes the upper Brooks River near the outlet of Lake Brooks and the cut bank, perhaps to avoid the presence of groups of people. She does not appear to consistently tolerate people in the river. #477 was not identified in 2016, but was seen in July 2017, mostly fishing in the riffles area below Brooks Falls.

#477 was seen again in July 2017, but seems to have other preferred locations during the fall, because she was again not seen during that season.

Adult Female



June 2015



September 2006



July 2015



September 2006



July 2010



July 2006



July 2006

482

Year First Identified: Young adult in 2001

Number of Known Litters: 4

#482 is a medium-sized adult. She has a shaggy dark blond coat with legs that are darker than her body. Her ears are tall, triangular, and match her head in color. Her eyes are dark and her muzzle is short and blocky.

Life History

First observed in 2001, #482 was an infrequent user of the Brooks River, appearing mostly in the fall until 2007. Beginning in 2008, however, she was observed in the river in July, as she would be for the next five years.

In early July 2017, she was identified after a four year absence from observations.

#482 returned to the Brooks River in 2018 with three springs cubs in tow. She was around for much of the summer and was seen again in the fall with all three cubs looking healthy and growing.

Adult Female



July 2017



July 2017



July 2017



July 2017



July 2014



July 2017



July 2017

504

Year First Identified: Young adult in 2014

Number of Known Litters: 1

Identification

#504 is a medium-small adult female with a brown coat, dark face, skinny tapered muzzle, and distinctive large, tall ears. In July, her coat is medium brown. In fall, her coat becomes dark brown, with grizzled fur around her head and shoulders. She has a semi-prominent shoulder hump and lacks a prominent brow.

Life History

This bear was not frequently observed at Brooks River until the summer of 2016. She was first identified as a young adult bear in 2014 but was not seen in 2015. She returned in 2016 with two small yearling cubs. One of the cubs was darker and larger than the other.

#504 and her cubs appeared remarkably thin when initially seen in July. Though wary of other bears, #504 continued to visit the falls, cut bank, and lower river consistently through the end of fall, gaining critical weight for the coming winter.

This bear appeared highly intolerant towards people and other bears throughout the 2016 season. On several occasions, she charged park staff and was often seen chasing other family groups and single bears away from the river. Bears who react defensively towards people or other bears are not “problem” bears, they are simply acting for their survival and to protect their cubs. Bears like #504 should be given extra caution and space.

#504 returned to Brooks River alone in July 2017. She was not seen showing the same defensive behaviors without cubs.

#504 was seen in both July and fall 2018.

Adult Female



July 2017



September 2017



July 2017



September 2017



July 2014



September 2016



September 2016

505

Year First Identified: Adult in 2014

Number of Known Litters: 1

Identification

#505 is a medium-sized adult bear. In summer, her coat is brown with a blonder mane and ears. She has a short, tapered, conical muzzle and a round face. Her claws are dark with tan colored tips.

Life History

Little information is known about this bear. When she was first identified in July 2014, she seemed inexperienced at Brooks Falls. At the time, she would try to fish nearly everywhere at the falls where she could gain access. Eventually, #505 settled into a routine of fishing the lip, begging, and occasionally stealing salmon, which she continued in 2015.

When attempting to steal or beg salmon, she will sometimes stand on her hind legs below the lip, while reaching up to grab or catch partially eaten salmon washing towards her. #505 will also lie flat on her stomach and coyly reach out with her front paws in an attempt to steal fish. She was not identified in the fall.

#505 was briefly seen at the end of July 2018 with two spring cubs—her first litter. She was not observed in the fall.

Adult Female



July 2017



July 2014



July 2017



July 2017



July 2015



July 2014



July 2014

610

Adult Female

Year First Identified: Young subadult in 2015

Identification

This is a very small, young subadult bear with a poofy blond coat and dark legs. This bear has a prominent shoulder hump, tall hips, and a dark face. An indent above the top right hip is visible and speculated to be a scar from a wound sustained in 2015. A smaller scar is also visible on the back of the left heel.

Life History

Little is known about this subadult bear. She has been seen scavenging for fish in the lower river area in both fall 2015 and 2016. Extremely skittish, #610 immediately leaves the area when other bears approach.

Due to #610's size and behavior, it has been speculated that this bear was abandoned as a yearling cub in 2015. Survival is difficult for all brown bears, and those difficulties (predation, starvation, disease, etc.) are magnified for a bear that has had limited protection and learning experience. #610 has shown incredible resiliency by overcoming the challenges presented thus far, and will need to continue to live cautiously and take advantage of any opportunities she is presented in order to survive.



September 2017



September 2017



September 2017



September 2016



September 2017



September 2017



September 2017

700 Marge

Year First Identified: Young subadult in 2003

Number of Known Litters: 1

Identification

#700 is a medium-sized bear with a short brown coat. The fur on her face and legs is usually longer than on her body. She has a sharp muzzle and dark claws. Her ears sometimes appear very large, especially early in the summer.

Life History

She is apparently wary around other bears (but relatively habituated to people) and kept cubs underneath the falls platform or treed them nearby while she fished. She acts very skittish around the falls in response to other bears. She raised her only known litter into their third summer. In 2008, this family was more often heard than seen as her cubs were particularly vocal when begging for salmon.

#700 was not identified in 2014 or 2015 but made a brief appearance in July 2016. Since the bears of Brooks River are not tagged or collared, their movements outside of our view are largely a mystery. Perhaps #700 found a more productive place to feed in 2014 and 2015 but found it to be less reliable in 2016. Perhaps she preferred to avoid the concentration of bears on Brooks River while raising offspring. We will never know for certain why #700's altered her behavior but her return is yet another example of the brown bears' adaptable nature and ability to survive in a changing environment.

#700 was seen on the river in 2017 but was not observed in 2018. She continues to use the Brooks River area sporadically and unpredictably.

Adult Female



July 2017



September 2007



July 2013



September 2010



July 2012



June 2003



September 2011

708 Amelia

Year First Identified: 2.5 year-old subadult in 2003
Number of Known Litters: 2

Identification

This bear has a small, but rotund body. In June and July, she has a light brown coat. By the fall, her coat becomes uniformly brown, with more reddish fur around neck in some years. #708's ears are perched high on her head. She has dark claws and a straight and short muzzle that resembles #468, who is believed to be her mother.

Life History

Several years ago, #708 was very well known by visitors and staff. As a subadult and young adult, she would often pass directly through camp if not discouraged—even while raising her first cub. More recently, however, she is rarely seen moving through Brooks Camp.

This bear has been seen fishing nearly everywhere in the river—falls, cut bank, lower river, and even at Lake Brooks. She often stands on her hind legs for prolonged periods to scan the river, which is a behavior that her offspring, #284, also has.

#708 is believed to be the offspring of #468. She was nicknamed in her subadult years because of her propensity to disappear. She was not identified in 2015.

In 2016, #708 returned to Brooks River with two large yearling cubs. She was most often seen fishing with her cubs along the cut bank and lower river, frequently standing on her hind legs while she fished. She returned in 2017 with both cubs, then 2.5 year olds, and raised them through the fall. In 2018, #708 emancipated her two cubs now both 3.5 years old.

Adult Female



July 2017



September 2017



July 2017



September 2017



July 2010



#708 as a subadult in July 2003



September 2007

717

Year First Identified: 2.5 year-old subadult in 2016

Identification

#717 is a small bear with a shaggy blond coat. Her legs are skinny and lighter than her body. Her ears are light, rectangular, and placed on the top of her head. Her muzzle is skinny, upturned, and tapered to a point. Her eyes are set close together.

Life History

A small subadult, #717 survives by exercising caution around other bears and by capitalizing on scavenging opportunities. She was seen in July 2017 eating scraps of salmon along the cut bank and riffles area. In the fall, she was observed fishing the cut bank and lower river.

Subadult bears like #717 are the underdogs of the bear world. Relegated to the least preferred fishing locations, #717 must consume enough calories to make it through winter, in addition to fueling her growth into adulthood. During this time she must remain vigilant of other bears that may prey on her. Though subadulthood is a time of struggle, young bears like #717 are adaptable, smart, and fully capable of succeeding.

Adult Female



July 2016



September 2016



July 2017



September 2016



July 2017



July 2017



September 2016

719

Adult Female

Year First Identified: 2.5 year-old subadult in 2016

Identification

#719 is a medium-sized subadult, with a shaggy blond coat that darkens slightly in the fall. She has large oval ears that are even lighter blond than her body. Her face is dark when shedding and her claws are light tipped. She is the offspring of #435 and looks much like a miniature version of her mother.

Life History

#719 is an example of the brown bear's capacity to learn and adapt its behavior for survival. In 2014, #719's mother adopted a lone yearling, #503. While cub adoption is a rarely observed event, #719 learned from the experience that an advantage can, in some cases, be made by approaching other bears. After being emancipated, #719 was frequently seen following and playing with her adopted sibling, #503. Soon after, and continuing to the end of fall, #719 began to follow #402 and her two yearling cubs.

Although #402 would occasionally charge #719 and drive her away, #402 appeared relatively tolerant of #719's presence. #719's behavior had several benefits: she was able to continue to learn survival skills by "sitting in" on the lessons #402 gave to her own cubs; she was shown the best fishing spots; and she received protection—other bears were much less likely to approach her when #402 and her cubs were nearby. In one instance, #402 even stopped a charge from #435 that was directed at #719.

Ironically, #402 is the biological mother of #503, #719's adopted sibling. We cannot know how cognizant #719 was of the events surrounding her development, but brown bears are intelligent. #719 appears to have learned from #503's adoption, and applied that knowledge to her own situation. She seems to have identified the risks and rewards of approaching an unknown bear, and used that knowledge to give herself the best chance at survival.

In 2017, and again in 2018, #719 frequently played and traveled with other subadults. Similar to the advantages gained by following #402 in 2016, #719 again gained the advantage of "safety in numbers" by spending time around other subadult bears. In the fall of 2018, she seemed to spend a lot of time around #812.



July 2017



September 2017



July 2017



September 2017



July 2017



July 2016



October 2016

720

Year First Identified: Subadult in 2016

Identification

#720 is a small female subadult bear. She has a shaggy, grizzled light brown coat. Her ears are short, triangular, and match the color of her coat. She has a short, straight muzzle with thick hair underneath, giving the appearance of a beard.

Life History

#720 has only been identified in the fall. She primarily fishes the cutbank and lower river. Like many subadults, she has been seen playing with other bears around her size and age. She was identified in the fall of both 2017 and 2018.

Adult Female



September 2017



September 2017



September 2017



September 2017



September 2017



October 2016



October 2016

804 (may be 806)

Year First Identified: Young adult in 2017

Identification:

#804 is a medium-small female subadult. She has a light brown coat with darker legs than her body. She has light tipped claws and an apparent over-bite profile. Her ears are triangular and the same color as her head.

Life History

#804 appears to be tolerant of other bears and people. She has been observed playing with other young bears and even approaching adult female bears.

#804 fished throughout Brooks River area, using the lower river, cutbank and falls. She successfully fished the lip of the falls for silver salmon during September and October—making her a conspicuous presence to bear viewers. Not all bears learn to fish the lip of the falls. It's possible that she was raised by a sow that used this fishing technique, or that she simply observed other bears and learned from them. #804's quick learning of the lip fishing technique is an example of that. This bear was only seen once in 2018.

Adult Female



September 2017



September 2017



September 2017



September 2017



September 2017



September 2017

813 Nostril Bear

Year First Identified: Subadult in 2004

Number of Known Litters: 3

Identification

#813 is an average-sized female bear. In July, she has brown, evenly colored fur that can sometimes be ragged in appearance. In the fall, her fur is also brown but appears less ragged. Her most distinctive feature is her oddly shaped nostrils.

Life History

This bear has infrequently used Brooks River during her adult life. When she was a subadult she was documented along the river more consistently. Bears can use their curiosity and powerful sense of smell to find and exploit new food resources. It is likely that she has found another place to fish during those years. When she is at Brooks River, she will fish at the falls in July as well as the cut bank and lower river. This bear typically does not use areas with high human use.

Her first documented litter was in 2014 when she returned to Brooks River with three spring cubs. In 2015, #813 returned with two yearling cubs from the 2014 litter. Since this is her only known litter, no one knows if she kept her cubs for another summer or push them away in the spring. #813 was not identified in 2016 or 2017. Brown bears in Katmai usually keep their cubs for two to three summers.

#813 did make a return to the Brooks River in 2018 with two spring cubs. She was seen on occasion in July and she was also seen in the fall with both cubs.

Adult Female



July 2013



September 2014



July 2015



September 2014



July 2013



September 2014



September 2014

854 Divot

Year First Identified: 2.5 year-old subadult in 2004

Number of Known Litters: 2

Identification:

#854 is medium-sized female. She has a golden-blond coat in July which darkens by late August to brown. Her muzzle is short and straight. In July, #854 often has a noticeable shed patch on her forehead. Her most distinctive feature is a circular scar around her neck from a wire snare that was removed in July 2014 ([see next page](#)). This scar, however, can sometimes be hard to see.

Life History

#854 shares a similar life history as her sibling #790. DNA analysis confirmed that her mother is #216 and #24 is her father. Over the past several years, her use of the river varied considerably. In some years (2013), she used the river infrequently, while in others (fall 2014), she was seen almost daily. As a young bear, she was often seen at the mouth of Brooks River in May digging in exposed gravel. Apparently attracted to rotten scraps of salmon left from the previous year. The divots she left in the gravel inspired her nickname.

In mid-July 2014, #854 arrived at Brooks River with two yearlings. After fishing in the lower Brooks River for a day or two, the family disappeared for about two weeks. When she returned on July 28, she had only one yearling and a wire snare tightly constricting her neck. Park staff successfully removed the snare.

#854 returned to Brooks River in fall 2016 with three spring cubs. She was seen using the river frequently, often near Lake Brooks and at the mouth of Naknek Lake. She continued to raise all three cubs through fall of 2017.

This bear returned alone in 2018 presumably having emancipated her cubs. She was often seen at the falls, sometimes begging other bears for salmon or waiting for scraps, as well as doing her own fishing. No matter her techniques, she is very successful at fattening up for the winter. She was seen again in the fall looking quite fat and happy and was often seen on the beach catching salmon in the lake.

Adult Female



July 2017



October 2017



July 2015



August 2016



#854's scar from a wire snare, July 2015



July 2008



September 2016

Removing a Wire Snare from #854 Divot

A team of park rangers and biologists successfully removed a wire snare from the neck of a bear.

In mid-July 2014, #854 arrived at Brooks River with two yearlings. After fishing in the lower Brooks River for a day or two the family disappeared for about two weeks. When she returned on July 28, she had only one yearling and a wire snare tightly constricting her neck.

Katmai is a large park, but wild animals do not recognize our political boundaries. #854 likely got caught in an illegally set, out of season snare designed to capture wolves. Four days before she returned to Brooks River, she was photographed outside of the park (near King Salmon) with a wire snare around her neck.

Rangers and park biologists tracked #854 and her yearling to a small stream that drains the eastern slopes of Dumpling Mountain. On July 30, park staff tranquilized #854 and successfully removed the snare. The snare had cut into her neck about one inch (2.5 cm) deep. Luckily the snare had not completely penetrated her epidermal layer.

By October 2014, this bear and her yearling cub appeared very fat and healthy. By removing the snare, park staff rectified a mistake and gave this bear family the best chance of survival.

[Read a complete description of the effort to remove the snare.](#)
[Watch a video of the effort.](#)



#854 with a wire snare around her neck on July 24 near King Salmon, AK.



#854 with wire snare after she returned to Brooks River on July 28.



Park staff removed the snare while she was tranquilized.



#854 lies unconscious during snare removal. Note the wound on her neck.

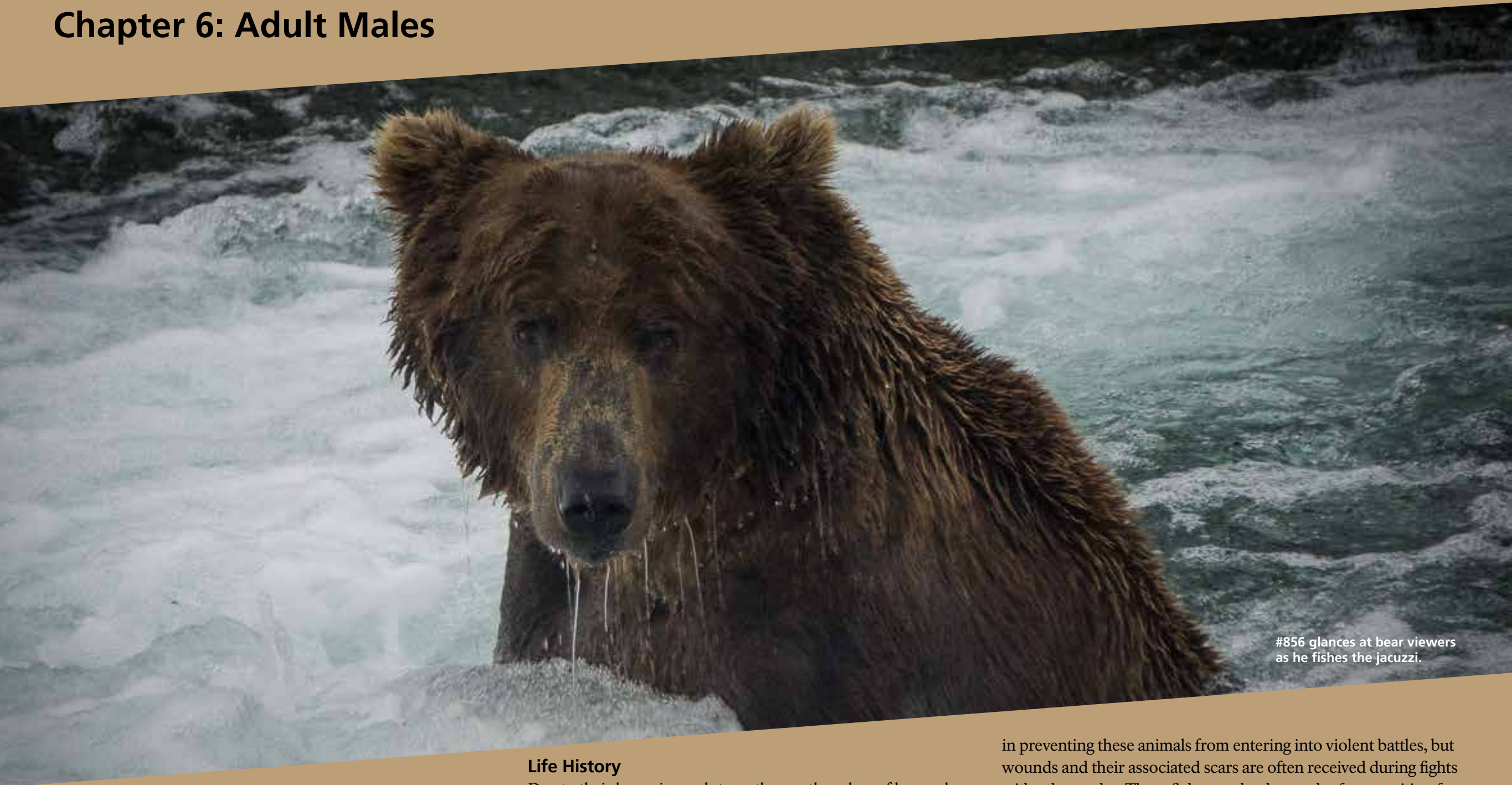


A lip tattoo was applied for future identification.



Recovery from the tranquilizer took hours. Here #854 had yet to regain use of her legs.

Chapter 6: Adult Males



#856 glances at bear viewers as he fishes the jacuzzi.

Identification

The largest bears frequenting the Brooks River are adult males, also called boars. Like full grown adult females, their bodies appear filled in, their heads appear smaller in proportion to their bodies, and their ears are generally wide-set. When male bears are shedding in the early summer, scars are often visible. Looking for genitalia is the easiest way to identify male bears, but you can also determine the sex of adult bears by watching them urinate. Male bears will urinate straight down between their hind legs.

Life History

Due to their large size and strength, no other class of brown bear is able to compete physically with a large adult male.

They can stand 3-5 feet (.9-1.5 m) at the shoulder and measure 7-10 (2.1-3 m) feet in length. Most adult males typically weigh 600-900 pounds (272-408 kg) in mid-summer. By October and November, large adult male bears in Katmai can weigh well over 1000 pounds (454 kg).

The best fishing spots at Brooks Falls are dominated by adult males. Hierarchy and displays of dominance play important roles

in preventing these animals from entering into violent battles, but wounds and their associated scars are often received during fights with other males. These fights can be the result of competition for food resources (access or appropriation) or for the opportunity to mate with females.

During mating season, boars may wander great distances in search of females in estrus. Once they locate an estrous female, they may need to follow her closely for days before she becomes receptive to mating. During this time, the male must defend access to her from other males.

32 Chunk

Year First Identified: Young subadult in 2007

Identification

#32 is a large adult male. In early summer, his coat is medium-brown and he sheds the fur on his shoulders first. He has numerous small scars and wounds around his neck and face. His ears are distinctly pointed, and he has a prominent brow. In the fall, his coat is a uniform dark brown. In all seasons, he appears to carry more weight in his hind quarters than in front which gives #32 a distinctive silhouette. He lacks a prominent shoulder hump.

Life History

#32 was first identified as a young subadult in 2007. Over the past several years, he has become increasingly dominant along the river. In 2015, he was subordinate to only the largest adult males at Brooks Falls. In 2017, he was subordinate to only #747. He will sometimes attempt to steal fish from other bears.

#32 fishes at the falls and the lower river. At Brooks Falls, he fishes the far pool and in the jacuzzi. #32 is sometimes seen in the Brooks River area in May and June. During this time he appeared to be courting young adult females.

In 2018, #32 was one of the latest arrivals back to the falls, but he did show up during July, and was seen again often during the fall. He was one of the bears in the upper echelon of the falls hierarchy.

Adult Male



June 2017



August 2016



June 2017



September 2016



July 2007



July 2008



September 2011

51 Diver Junior

Year First Identified: Subadult in 2007

Identification

#51 is an adult male with large, oval ears, and a medium blond or rusty brown coat. He has a long muzzle that tapers nearly into his forehead. In July, numerous small scars are visible on his body and neck.

Life History

Although #51 is nicknamed Diver Junior, there is no known relation between this bear and the famous Diver, who was last seen in the late 1990s.

#51 can be seen walking below the Falls Platform to and from the fish ladder. He commonly fishes the far pool on the north side of the falls, and has attempted to fish the jacuzzi. He is usually displaced by most other adult males at the falls. #51 is not known to use the river consistently in the fall. The only year he was seen at Brooks River in September was in 2012. #51 was not identified in 2016, but was seen briefly in early summer 2017. In 2018, #51 was observed briefly in July and not seen in the fall.

Adult Male



June 2017



September 2012



July 2014



July 2011



July 2013



July 2012



July 2007

68

Year First Identified: Subadult in 2007

Identification

#68 is large bodied with a light brown coat in summer that shows distinctive scars on his left shoulder and the right side of his muzzle. His face sheds out dark and his ears are widely spaced. In fall, #68 has light eye rings and sports a dark brown coat with slightly blond tipped ears.

Life History

This bear has been seen at Brooks River every year since 2007, though most years he is only observed in the fall. #68 was seen at Brooks River in July 2013 and again in July 2016. In July 2016, he regularly fished at the falls and often ate his catch on the boulder in the far pool.

In September 2011, #68 was seen with a large wound on his lower right leg. At the end of the month, he had trouble moving that leg and appeared to be dragging it. However, he appeared to have made a full recovery and has even grown in size. His history is another example of toughness and resiliency—a hallmark of brown bears.

In 2018, #68 was not observed in July but he was seen in the fall.

Adult Male



July 2016



September 2016



July 2016



August 2012



July 2016



September 2010



September 2015

83 Wayne Brother

Year First Identified: Adult in 2008

Identification

#83 is a large bodied bear. In July, he often sports a light brown coat, dark eye rings as well as numerous small scars and wounds on his face, neck, and front legs. Like many large adult males, his ears are wide set. He displays a large scar on his right shoulder from a wound received in 2012. In 2015, he had a large, deep wound above his hips that appeared to have reopened in 2016. As of 2017, the wound had healed but produced a recognizable scar. In the fall, his coat is medium brown with grizzled highlights especially around his neck.

Life History

#83 is another adult bear that matured along the Brooks River. He is believed to be the offspring of #438 and the sibling of #868.

Even though #83 and #868 undoubtedly shared many of the same learning experiences as cubs, they differ in their fishing styles and hold different ranks in the bear hierarchy. In July, #83 fishes below Brooks Falls in the jacuzzi and, especially, near the middle of the falls. In contrast, his sibling #868 is often seen fishing the lip. Over the past several years, #83 was a more dominant bear at the falls than his sibling and was only displaced by the very largest male bears. In the fall, #83 fishes the cut bank and lower river like most bears.

In 2018, #83 was active during July and in the fall, and fattened up quite nicely.

Adult Male



July 2017



September 2017



July 2017



September 2017



July 2015



June 2014



October 2012

89 Backpack

Year First Identified: 2.5 year-old subadult in 2008

Identification

#89 is a medium-sized young adult bear. He has a distinctive face with dark, round eye rings, and a straight muzzle. His coat is usually lighter blond in early summer, but it changes to a grizzled, dark blond or brown in the fall.

Life History

#89 was born in 2006. He is the offspring of #435 and was first observed as an independent bear in 2008.

As a yearling cub in 2007, his right front leg was injured and he limped noticeably throughout the summer. Remarkably, by early fall, his leg appeared to have healed. The injury was not noticeable in 2008, which was his first summer as an independent bear. This is another example of the resilient nature of bears and their ability to persevere through significant injuries.

In July 2014, he would regularly fish at Brooks Falls near much larger bears that tolerated his presence. He can be a playful bear too. In 2014 and 2015, for example, he was seen play fighting with #32, #151, #274, and #474.

#89 will fish the falls in July, and like many young adult males, he is ascending the hierarchy of bears at Brooks River, but is still displaced by larger, more mature males. Young male bears like #89 sometimes look small compared to older adult males, but #89 is not small. He has grown significantly since 2008 and likely will continue to grow as he matures.

#89 was seen in July 2018 primarily fishing beneath the falls between the jacuzzi and the back wall.

Adult Male



June 2017



September 2015



July 2017



September 2014



June 2016



#89 as a yearling cub with an injured leg in 2007



September 2012

115

Year First Identified: Adult in 2008

Identification

#115 is a large adult male with a wavy dark brown coat. He sometimes has a lighter patch of fur on the right side of his neck. His ears are light tipped and his muzzle is thick, blocky, and slightly upturned.

Life History

#115 has only been identified in the fall. Excluding 2009 and 2015, #115 has been observed each year since 2008. He generally is first seen late in September. In 2018, he fished the falls. In some years, he was seen most often at the cutbank and lower river.

Adult Male



September 2017



September 2017



September 2017



October 2017



October 2014



September 2015



October 2014

151 Walker

Year First Identified: 2.5 year-old subadult in 2009

Identification

#151 is a medium-sized, young adult with a lanky body. His coat is uniformly brown, even in July. He has upright and wide-set ears, a distinctly upturned and skinny muzzle, and large dark eye rings.

Life History

#151 was classified as an independent 2.5 year-old bear in 2009. He regularly visits Brooks Falls in July and fishes at the cut bank and lower Brooks River in the fall. As a young adult, #151 was sometimes displaced from his preferred fishing spots. However, he has grown significantly in recent years. During 2016, he was displaced less often and was seen displaying dominance over other, younger bears more often than in previous years.

Young adulthood can be a difficult and challenging time for bears. Young adults, like #151, are consistently challenged by older, larger, and more dominant bears. This is a fact of life in the bear world. The most dominant bears are the least likely to yield space or food, while less dominant, younger bears are most likely to yield. The hierarchy of bears at Brooks River changes every year. #151 is still climbing the ladder of the bear hierarchy, so is still sometimes displaced by other, more dominant bears.

#151 is a particularly playful bear. He has been observed playing extensively with #503, #289, #32, and others. Bears hone survival skills by engaging in play. Play-fighting can improve strength, speed, coordination, and muscle-memory needed during real fights for survival with other bears.

In 2018, #151 rarely seemed to leave the river. With another strong red salmon run, followed by silver salmon, he was seen at the falls almost daily from July through mid October. He seemed to favor the area around the far wall.

While this bear continued to play with #503, it occasionally turned into brief, but real, fighting. Overall, #151 was a fixture at the falls for much of the 2018 season.

Adult Male



July 2017



September 2016



July 2017



September 2016



July 2014



#151 plays with #755 in July 2017



September 2016

274

Year First Identified: 4.5 year-old subadult in 2011

Identification

#274 is a young adult male. He is large for his age and has long legs, which gives him a lanky appearance. His coat is blond and fluffy especially around his face and forehead. In July, he quickly sheds out and his new coat grows in dark brown except for a golden crown along the top of his head and ears. In the fall, he looks very similar to #868, only smaller.

Life History

As a young adult bear, #274 appeared more confident around larger adults than other bears his age, often approaching them much closer than other young bears would dare.

He attempted to fish the lip, fish ladder, and the jacuzzi, but in 2015, he was seen most often fishing the cut bank and lower river. He has had success fishing the riffles and by scavenging scraps from other bears. In one notable moment in 2013, he managed to steal a fish from #856 when that bear confronted another male. Seeing that #856 had left his fish unattended, #274 swooped in, picked it up, and ran quickly down river before the dominant boar turned around.

In 2018, #274 was seen during viewing sessions in both July and in the fall.

Like #83 and #868, #274 is believed to be the offspring of #438.

Adult Male



June 2017



September 2017



July 2017



September 2017



June 2014



July 2011



September 2012

469

Year First Identified: Adult in 2001

Identification

#469 is a medium-large male bear. His claws are dark and he has short, round ears. His muzzle is blocky and straight. #469's coat is brown. His most distinctive feature is a blond, diamond-shaped patch of fur on his left shoulder.

Life History

From 2001-2011, #469 was an irregular user of the Brooks River and Naknek Lake in the fall. He was usually only seen in the morning and would leave the area when human activity increased. This may indicate that #469 is not tolerant of people. In 2013, this pattern was broken when he was seen fishing regularly at Brooks Falls in July—even with large numbers of people watching from the Falls Platform.

It is unknown why #469 changed his habits. When he arrived in 2013, he was limping and would not place any weight on his left hind leg. This injury may have reduced his ability to find food elsewhere or he may have just discovered the fishing opportunities at Brooks Falls in July. Whatever the reason, #469 modified his behavior to fish at the falls. Bears, even older bears, shift their habits and behaviors when necessary for survival.

This bear was also seen guarding a bear carcass in October 2012. It is unknown whether or not #469 killed the bear. He was not seen in 2014 but he made one brief appearance at Brooks Falls in June 2015. During fall 2016, a bear was spotted with a similar blond diamond-shaped patch of fur on his left shoulder, though it is not certain it was indeed #469. He was not identified in 2017. There was a brief sighting of him in October 2018.

Adult Male



June 2015



September 2010



July 2013



September 2012



July 2013



July 2013



September 2006

474

Year First Identified: Adult in 2014

Identification

This is a medium-sized adult male bear with a dark, smooth looking face. His ears are light tipped and his coat is dark brown with longer fur on his back and neck.

Life History

#474 is another bear only seen at Brooks River in the fall. Like most bears in September and October, he tends to fish the cutbank and lower river areas, although he typically doesn't fish the mouth of the river when many are people present. Many bears, like #474, that are only seen in the fall and typically fish the cutbank area, are not usually tolerant of the close proximity of people.

In recent years, #474 was seen fishing at Brooks Falls for silver salmon. He was observed once during the fall of 2018.

Adult Male



September 2017



September 2014



September 2015



September 2017



September 2015



September 2015



October 2014

480 Otis

Year First Identified: 2001 as an older subadult or young adult

Identification

In early summer, #480 has a medium to dark blond coat which darkens to brown with blonder patches in the fall. He has tan tipped claws and scars on both sides of his neck. His ears are wide set and his right ear is floppy. His muzzle is long, straight, and narrow. He has a prominent scar above his right eye. In the fall, his body is fat and walrus-shaped with a relatively thick, wrinkled neck.

Life History

#480 was first classified as an older subadult bear in 2001. He, along with #218, use some of the most efficient fishing techniques at the falls. #480 prefers the jacuzzi, but unlike many other bears, he tolerants numerous bears around him while he eats. These bears wait patiently for him to finish and eat any leftover fish scraps.

Despite the fact that #480 is neither as large nor aggressive as some other male bears, he was rarely displaced from his preferred fishing spot in the jacuzzi from 2005-2011. However in recent years, other mature males have surpassed him in size and as a result, #480 has slipped down the bear hierarchy. #747 and #856 now regularly displace him from his preferred fishing spots and #814 will steal fish from him.

#480 is one of the few bears that can successfully fish at Brooks Falls in September. Late in the season, he is often seen fishing in the far pool. #480 was once a more playful bear. In 2003, for instance, he was observed playing with many bears including #489 and #634.

#480 is missing two canine teeth. The injury appears to inhibit his ability to “high-grade” fish—to pick out the fattiest parts of the salmon (skin, brain, and roe). This did not stop him from putting on the necessary weight for winter survival. Missing teeth is just another obstacle bears like #480 must overcome to survive year after year.

Adult Male



July 2017



September 2016



July 2017



September 2016



July 2014



October 2002



September 2016

503

Year First Identified: 1.5 year-old cub in 2014

Identification

#503 is a young adult male with tall, lanky legs. In July, his fur is light to medium-brown and he sheds dark eye rings and a dark face. His neck and head are usually last to shed. In the fall, his fur darkens to a grizzled-brown and is slightly lighter on his head and neck. He has a protruding lower lip, tall brown ears, and dark claws.

Life History

#503 has a unique life history. As a cub, #503 originally belonged to #402, but after an unusually timed series of events, he was abandoned by his biological mother in early July. Most cubs are pushed away by their mothers in the spring after two to three summers. As a lone and small yearling, he faced many threats to his survival, not the least of which was other bears. Since he was then independent and observed during several bear monitoring sessions, he was assigned #503.

By the end of July, he was adopted by #435, a female with a single spring cub. #435 treated her adopted yearling just like her biological spring cub. She allowed him to nurse, take fish from her, and play with the spring cub. We will never know #435's reasons for adopting the yearling with any certainty, but bears, even young bears, are adaptable and smart. They possess the ability to recognize favorable situations and take advantage of them. In #503's case, the reward (protection, food) was worth taking the risk (intolerant bear, injury, death) of approaching a strange bear. If he had approached an intolerant female too closely, he could have been injured or killed. Instead, his strategy helped to ensure his survival into subadulthood.

#435 continued to raise #503 through 2015 and emancipated him along with her biological cub in spring of 2016. Throughout that summer, #503 was seen fishing and scavenging in all areas of the river. He even succeeded in fishing the jacuzzi, and appeared willing to fish near other bears and anglers. #503 often played with other subadult and young adult bears, including #719, #602, #151, and #289.

In 2017, #503 often played with bears similar to his increasing size. He regularly fished at Brooks Falls in the presence of far larger and more dominant bears. This behavior continued in 2018 and younger subadult bears often gathered around him as he fished. He seemed to share fish with smaller bears, a very interesting trait. #503 continues to be a playful and a regular bear at the falls.

Adult Male



July 2017



September 2017



July 2017



October 2017



September 2016



July 2016



#503 with his adoptive mother in September 2014

602

Adult Male

Year First Identified: Subadult in 2015

Identification

#602 is a medium-sized, compact, and well proportioned subadult. He has dark, grizzled fur even in July when most young bears sport blonder coats. His ears are the same color as his body and perched high on his head. He has a round face with a short, upturned snout and closely set eyes. He has a thin scar on the left side of his muzzle.

Life History

In July 2015, this bear fished throughout the river, often moving quietly as he did so. In the fall, he fished for dead and dying salmon through most of the lower Brooks River.

#602 was not identified in the summer of 2016 or 2017, but was seen in the fall of both years, fishing throughout the river. He was observed playing with #503 and #719.

Though previously classified as a female, #602 is now believed to be male. This is a good example of the challenges involved in identifying subadult bears, who often move erratically and quickly change appearance as they grow.



July 2015



September 2017



July 2015



September 2016



July 2015



September 2017



September 2016

603

Adult Male

Year First Identified: Adult in 2015

Identification

#603 is a medium-sized adult male. He has a light brown coat that sheds out on his face first. In 2017, he appeared with many scars on his face and neck and with several puncture-like marks on the left side of his face. His ears are light-tipped and his muzzle is dark. He had a distinctive triangular scar behind his right shoulder that may still be visible.

Life History

#603 was first identified as an adult in 2015 and primarily fished in the lower river. He was not identified in 2016, but returned to Brooks River in 2017. He fished the far side of Brooks Falls and occasionally in the lower river and cutbank. He was seen again in the fall of 2018.

#603 was consistently challenged by #32. He was pushed out of preferred fishing locations and forced to adjust his fishing techniques. Still, #603 continued to use Brooks River frequently during July. Competition between bears over limited space on the Brooks River necessitates flexibility in smaller, less aggressive bears like #603.



July 2017



July 2017



July 2017



July 2017



July 2017



July 2017



July 2017

634 Popeye

Year First Identified: Older subadult in 2002

Identification

This bear is medium large. He has large, furry, dark forearms that inspired his nickname. His coat is brown, grizzled, and generally uniform with blondish ears. #634's muzzle is short and upturned. He lacks distinctive scars.

Life History

#634 was classified as a subadult in 2002 and then as an adult in 2003. In May of 2004, he appeared on the beach at Brooks Camp with a severe limp. He would not place any weight on the injured leg, but returned the next year showing no affects of the injury. In 2017, he had another severely injured leg on which he could put little weight, but by fall the leg had healed.

His preferred fishing spot tends to be beneath the falls, between the jacuzzi and the far wall. Over the last few years, #634 has maintained a semi-high position in the bear hierarchy. He will aggressively steal fish from smaller bears, especially early in the salmon run and in 2014 he mated with several females including #128, #708, and #409. He occasionally wanders through the lower Brooks River area, including through camp. This is one bear that may be seen near Brooks Camp and on Dumpling Mountain in May and early June.

During the 2018 season, #634 was seen regularly around the falls. On July 3, he was chased from the falls by #856 and running into #132 and her two spring cubs by the Riffles Platform. One of the cubs was killed by one of these large males. It was a poignant reminder that these are wild animals.

Adult Male



July 2017



September 2010



July 2017



September 2006



#634 copulated with #409 in June 2014



July 2011



Subadult #634 in July 2003

747

Adult Male

Year First Identified: Subadult in 2004

Identification

#747 is one of the largest, heaviest bears that use Brooks River. He has a medium-brown coat with reddish shoulders. Early in the summer, his fur regularly sheds out in an erratic pattern and he often has a noticeable shed patch on his forehead. During the fall months, his fur is dark brown. His ears are round and peg-like, and his face has a prominent brow ridge. He has dark claws, a short but blocky muzzle, and a large, stocky, and squat body.

Life History

First classified as a subadult in 2004, #747 is now a mature adult bear and may have been the heaviest bear on Brooks River in recent years. He is often seen at Brooks Falls in July and is very successful at fishing in the jacuzzi and far pool. He also fishes the falls in September and October.

#747 does not appear to be wary of people on the viewing platforms near Brooks Falls and is sometimes seen near the mouth of the Brooks River. In years past, he was rarely seen in areas with high numbers of people.

Since 2007, this bear has noticeably grown in size. He is now one of the most dominant on the river. Even though he is a dominant bear, he is somewhat more tolerant of other bears than most other dominant bears like #814 and #856.

In 2017, #747 was not regularly seen at Brooks Falls until fall. After arriving, he was commonly seen displacing the largest, most dominant bears and yielding to none.

In 2018, #747 was regularly seen at Brooks Falls in both July and in the fall. He is usually one of the largest bears by fall. He was beaten out for “Fattest Bear” contest the last couple of years due to popularity or the angle of photographs. He vows to make another run in 2019.



July 2016



September 2017



August 2017



September 2017



June 2014



Subadult #747 in July 2004



August 2012

755 Scare D Bear

Year First Identified: Subadult in 2004

Identification

#755 is a medium-sized adult male with a golden brown or tan colored coat, round ears, and a tapered muzzle. His dark eye rings can be a distinctive feature early in the summer. In the fall, his coat is a uniform brown with contrasting, light colored ears.

Life History

#755 was classified as a subadult when first observed in 2004. He has fished at Brooks Falls every year since, but this bear has never shown much tolerance towards humans. He can be described as non-human-habituated.

#755 will fish the falls during daylight hours when the platform is full of people, but rarely leaves the far side of the river at those times. If he does approach the Falls Platform, he moves quickly behind it, never in front. Sometimes, however, he will fish the lip of the falls when only one or two people are on the platform. He has been observed running away from the riffles area when people approach and is not known to use the lower Brooks River, even in the fall. His intolerance of people seems to increase in the fall.

People can easily displace bears like #755 from the river. Humans, in his mind, are competitors to be avoided. For bears that display this behavior, it is important to give them space so we don't displace them from the resources they need to survive.

Adult Male



July 2017



September 2012



July 2017



September 2006



June 2008



Subadult #755 in 2004



September 2011

775 Lefty

Year First Identified: Adult in 2004

Identification

#775 is a medium-large bear with a tapering, but thick neck. He has a Roman nose and lacks a prominent brow ridge. His coat is a uniform brown and he has a sizable scar near his right hip. This bear's most distinctive feature is short left ear.

Life History

Until 2015, #775 was only known to use Brooks River in the fall. That changed in July 2015, when he arrived unexpectedly at Brooks Falls and fished for several weeks. When he first arrived, #775 appeared to have no prior experience fishing at Brooks Falls and his behavior indicated that he was very hungry. He challenged nearly every bear at the falls for fish, even very dominant bears like #856, and successfully stole fish from female bears. For several days, the mere sight of salmon caused him to run and pursue them. He even leaped off of the falls into the jacuzzi to try and catch salmon. After a few days, he learned to fish the lip of the falls without resorting to belly flops.

Bears are typically ravenous by early summer, but most bears with experience fishing at Brooks Falls know to bide their time and be patient. #775 frenzied activity showed his need for calories and lack of experience at the falls. He quickly learned to catch fish on the lip, a skill he did not possess when he first arrived. This, combined with his energetic pursuit of salmon, demonstrated his hunger and ability to learn.

In the fall, he is often seen fishing at the cut bank and sometimes further downstream, but does not typically approach the mouth of the river. Like many of the bears that use the river in the fall, he does not appear to be particularly tolerant of the presence of people. He often moves away from groups of people walking through the river.

From 2016-2018, #775 returned to Brooks Falls in July and consistently fished the lip of the falls. He rarely challenges other bears, save for the occasional early season attempt to steal fish, but spends most of his time being one of the most adept bears at fishing the lip of the falls.

[Watch #775 leap off of Brooks Falls.](#)

Adult Male



July 2017



September 2014



July 2017



September 2013



October 2006



October 2004



October 2004

801

Year First Identified: Subadult in 2015

Identification

#801 is a medium-small bear with dark brown coat in July. His ears are the same color as his coat and point out to the side. He has a long blocky muzzle and shed circles around his eyes. His claws are light-tipped. He has a small scar underneath his right eye and scars on both sides of his neck.

Life History

#801 was first identified in the fall of 2015. He was not identified in 2016, but returned in 2017 and again in 2018. He was seen fishing the far side of the falls and around the cutbank area.

Keep an eye out for bears like #801 that are less frequently seen. Their life histories will continue to develop as they are observed along the Brooks River.

Adult Male



July 2017



July 2017



July 2017



July 2017



July 2017



July 2017



July 2017

856

Adult Male

Year First Identified: Young adult in 2006

Identification

#856 is a large bear. He has a uniformly brown and grizzled coat, his ears are blond and wide-set, and often pinned back. His forehead is wide and furred. He also has a noticeable dorsal stripe in July. His face and front legs may have numerous small scars.

Life History

#856 was classified as a young adult in 2006. Since then, he has been one of the largest and most dominant bears along the river. His dominance was challenged in 2017, however, when he yielded space to #32 and #747. Returning healthy in 2018, he ascended back to the top of the hierarchy.

#856's behavior and mere presence often has cascading effects on the behavior of other bears. Dominance over other bears confers many advantages. For example, over the past several years, he has mated with several females. In July 2014, #856 spent considerable time courting females. Consequently, he was noticeably skinnier than #747 or #814 by the end of that month.

In Katmai, most male bears do not have the opportunity to mate with females until they are fully grown adults—when their size allows them to compete with other adult males for access to females. However, the hierarchy can change quickly, even within the same season. Therefore, most bears like #856 are adapted to take advantage of their position in the hierarchy.

In July 2011, #856 managed to separate #402 from one of her cubs; he later returned and killed the cub. It is unclear why adult males will sometimes kill cubs (also see #814). #856 and #402 mated again in 2012, and #402 returned with three spring cubs in 2013. In 2014, #856 continued his soap opera-like relationship with #402. While she was still caring for a cub from her 2013 litter, #402 apparently went into estrus, abandoned the cub, and after an extended courtship period of 11 days she mated with #856. Since #402 had a litter of four cubs in 2015, it is likely #856 is their father.

In 2018, #856 was chasing #634 downriver from the falls when they ran into #132 and her two spring cubs. One of the cubs was killed. #856 is one of the areas most dominant bears.



July 2017



September 2014



July 2017



September 2014



July 2016



July 2006



July 2006

879

Year First Identified: Subadult in 2006

Identification

#879 has a tall, large body, and a brown coat. His muzzle is long and straight. He has tall, upright ears that are the same color as his coat and he has a long neck.

Life History

#879 is another “fall” bear who has not been identified in July. He may fish other streams in the summer, choosing to use Brooks River only later in the season. Alternatively, he may use Brooks River in July but is unrecognizable upon returning in late August or September. Like the salmon they depend upon, brown bears go through dramatic physical changes over the course of a few weeks. As they gain hundreds of pounds and shed their fur, it can become difficult to distinguish individuals from one another or match those individuals to bears observed earlier in the season.

Unlike many bears, #879 never swam underneath the floating bridge at the mouth of Brooks River. It will be interesting to watch his, and other bears, behavior as they adapt to the new bridge. He also makes a lot of noise (groans and heavy breathing) when he eats salmon.

Adult Male



September 2017



September 2017



August 2016



September 2014



September 2014

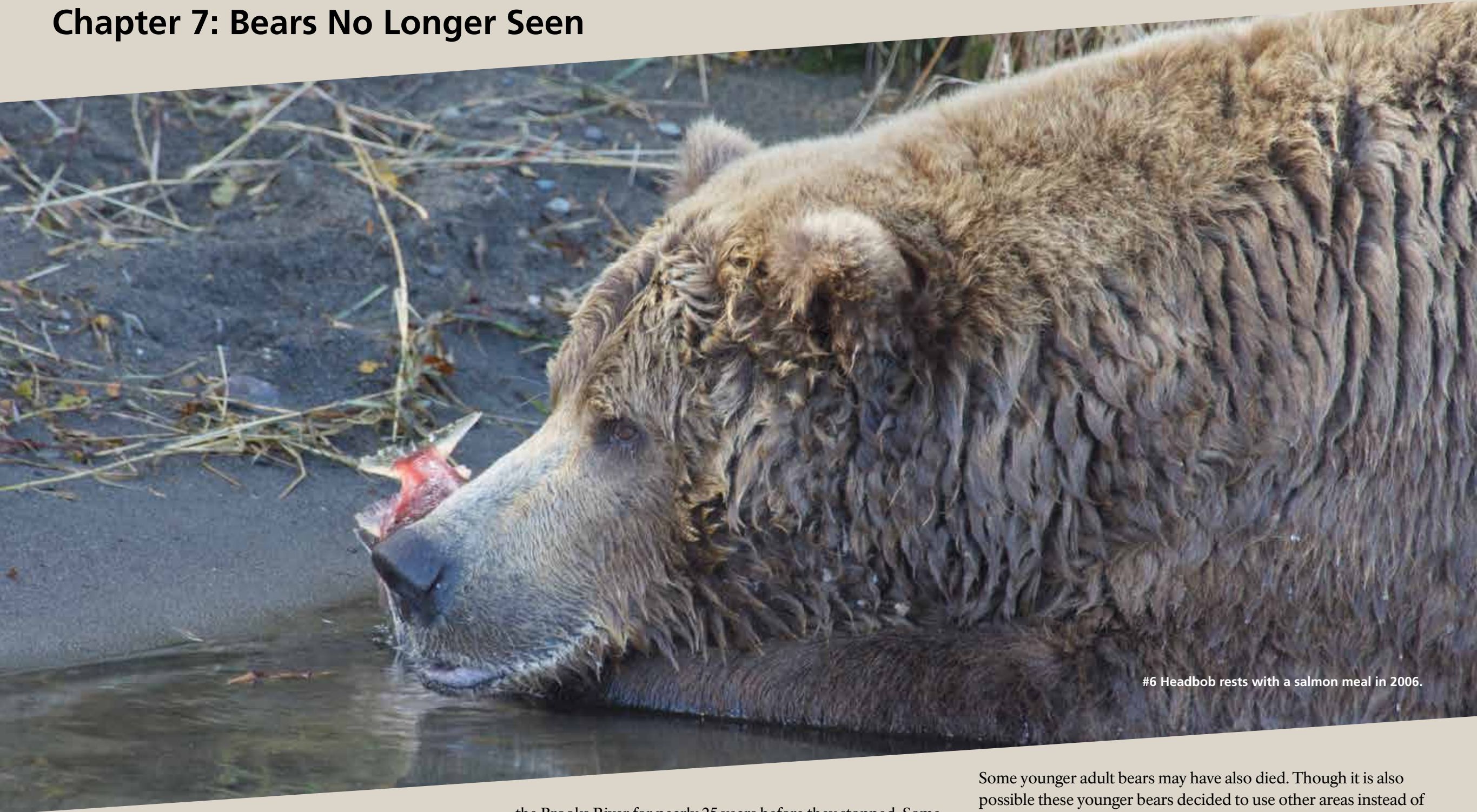


September 2011



Subadult #879 in September 2006

Chapter 7: Bears No Longer Seen



#6 Headbob rests with a salmon meal in 2006.

The following profiles identify bears that have not been seen along the Brooks River for at least three summers or that are known to be deceased. Bears in this section are arranged by their number.

Though you will not see these bears, they can still teach us many lessons about the lives of bears. Some bears returned to

the Brooks River for nearly 25 years before they stopped. Some younger, but still mature, adult bears who, for unknown reasons, are no longer seen. We do not know why some bears stop using the river. Older bears like #6, #16, and #236 were frequent users of the Brooks River year after year so it's likely they didn't return because they died. Disease, injuries, and predation can also shorten a bear's life.

Some younger adult bears may have also died. Though it is also possible these younger bears decided to use other areas instead of the Brooks River. In only a few instances (#130, #219, and #868) can death be confirmed.

Bears are known to alter their behavior and movement patterns when they discover new food sources, find that a formerly reliable food source is unreliable, or to deal with greater or lesser levels of competition from other bears or people.

1 Diver

Year First Identified: Unknown, likely in mid 1970s.
Year Last Identified: 1999

Identification

Diver was a large adult male with golden-brown fur in July and dark brown fur in the fall. His muzzle was blocky and his ears were wide-set. He had a distinctive scar on his back from a wound he received in the late 1980s.

Life History

#1 was an extremely long-lived bear and estimated to be over 30 years old when he was last seen in 1999. He was nicknamed for his habit of diving—a fishing technique he skillfully used more often than any other bear.

In the 1970s, Diver would fish the jacuzzi at Brooks Falls in July and in the fall dive for fish in the Brooks River. Diving allowed him to feed on salmon that generally was inaccessible to most other bears. In the fall, he was often very fat—evidence that diving can be a lucrative fishing style.

Adult Male



July 1997



6 Headbob

Year First Identified: Young adult in 1988

Year Last Identified: 2010

Identification

In July, #6 had an orange-blond coat. His left ear was flopped over and his muzzle was dog-like. He also had a thin lower lip and dark claws. He was sometimes confused with #211 who also has a droopy lip and ear, but #211 was darker, stockier, and had a more barrel-shaped torso.

Life History

#6 was one of the oldest and most recognizable bears in Katmai due to his preferred fishing spot at the top lip of the falls. He was classified as a young adult in 1988 and eventually became one of the oldest bears that frequented the Brooks River.

When he fished on the lip of the falls, #6 typically stood in one spot waiting for fish to jump within range rather than shifting locations. He could sometimes be observed holding his head out with his neck extended, then raising (bobbing) his head upward once or twice in quick succession as if sniffing the air.

Despite his old age, he often displaced younger males at the top of the falls. In July, he fished the lip but also fished in the far pool and the jacuzzi, and he occasionally stole fish. He was often seen fishing in, and sleeping on the banks of, the lower river late in the season.

Adult Male



July 2010



© Tamara Olson

July 1988



October 2002

16 Cinnamon

Year First Identified: Adult in 1988

Year Last Identified: 2011

Identification

#16 had a cinnamon-brown coat with blonder ears, a drooping lower lip, and white claws. This bear had no large distinctive scars, but he did have scars on the side of his head and shoulders. In later years, he was thinner than most adult bears.

Life History

When he was last seen in 2011, he was among the oldest bears in the Brooks River area. #16 was classified as an adult in 1988, placing his age around 30 in 2011 and well past an adult male brown bear's average life expectancy.

He returned to Brooks River every year from 1988 to 2011. At the falls in 2011 he rarely fished. Instead, he regularly begged other bears for fish scraps or obtained leftover fish parts. When not begging he would often rest near the Falls Platform or on the small island nearby.

Although it appeared other bears would "give" #16 fish, such compassion is believed to lie outside a bear's capacity. It is more likely that some bears, notably #747, learned to tolerate #16 because of his advanced age, poor physical condition, and submissive posture. This posturing may have increased his chances of scavenging leftover fish from other bears.

In some respects, #16's advanced age and dramatic fall to the bottom of the hierarchy are reminders of the harsh realities wild animals face. Yet #16's presence at Brooks Falls, when other bears of his age class and status have died or otherwise failed to return, demonstrated his survival skills.

Adult Male



July 2003



© Tamara Olson

July 1988



September 2010

24 BB

Year First Identified: Adult in 1996

Year Last Identified: 2009

Identification

#24 was a large, long-legged, tall, and dark-colored bear with white claws. In July, his coat was a medium-dark brown with hints of blonde around his neck. Large areas of his hind quarters were usually bare when he was shedding. He had a narrow, straight Roman nose which gave his face a black bear-like profile. He was missing a chunk of flesh from his nostrils and numerous scars were visible, but none were distinctive.

Life History

As early as 1997, bear monitoring staff noted that #24 was one of the largest and most dominant bears seen along Brooks River.

#24 had a reputation of being hyper-dominant and was observed killing other bears. His reign as the most dominant bear of Brooks River ended in 2006 and 2007 when he was displaced by #864. After encounters with #864, he was less aggressive towards other bears, but still very dominant.

#24 has not been seen since 2009. DNA analysis has confirmed that he is the father of #790 and #854.

Adult Male



June 2003



July 2007



June 2007

45 Tatonka

Year First Identified: Adult in 2007

Year Last Identified: 2014

Identification

#45 was an adult male with a medium-brown coat. In early July, he was most recognizable by his sloping body shape, which gave him the appearance of having shorter hind legs than most bears. He also had a distinct face, characterized by closely spaced eyes and oval shaped ears. His muzzle was long and pointed with a semi-distinctive dark band or scar running across it.

Life History

First observed as an adult in 2007, #45 was a regular visitor to Brooks Falls during July. In later years, he shifted his use of the river to the fall months. He had not used the Brooks River in July since 2012, but was seen in September or October. He usually moved slowly back and forth between the falls and the riffles, and his behavior suggested he was intolerant of bear viewers and anglers. He was last seen in 2014.

Adult Male



July 2010



September 2014



September 2014



July 2008



July 2012



July 2012

130 Tundra

Year First Identified: 2.5 year-old subadult in 2009

Year Last Identified: 2014

Number of Known Litters: 0

Identification

#130 was a small adult with a medium-blond coat and round ears of the same color. Her most distinctive feature was a scar above her left eye.

Life History

#130 commonly fished the cut bank and lower Brooks River. Occasionally she visited the falls, but she was not large enough to regularly compete for those fishing spots. This young bear showed signs of habituation towards people, especially around Brooks Camp, though she usually avoided other bears and people when surprised.

She is believed to be the offspring of #409. In 2008, while #130 was still with her mother, she received a bloody wound above her left eye that resulted in her recognizable scar. On July 1, 2014, #130 was found dead at the cut bank. Her skull was collected and cleaned so it could be used for educational and interpretive programs. As it turns out, #130 apparently fractured her skull in 2008 only to persevere through the injury to live several more years.

[View photos of this bear on the day she was found dead](#) (some photos are graphic).

Adult Female



June 2014



In July 2008, #130 apparently suffered a skull fracture.



#130's skull reveals evidence of a fracture above her left eye.

161

Year First Identified: Subadult in 2009

Year Last Identified: 2014

Identification

#161 was a semi-large, mature adult and comparable in size to #83 and #868. He had a dark coat, a thick and blocky muzzle, and a large round scar on his right hip. His ears were rounded, light-tipped, and perch on top of his forehead.

Life History

#161 was first identified in July 2009 but after that initial sighting, he was only seen fishing the cut bank and lower Brooks River in the fall. In 2014, he was seen participating in extended bouts of play with #83 and #868.

Little information about this bear is contained within Katmai's ID records. Like #879, this bear seemed to only use Brooks River in the fall. It is unlikely this bear used Brooks River in July, since the large scar on his right hip would have made him so identifiable. He was last identified in 2014.

Adult Male



September 2012



September 2013



September 2010



September 2012



September 2012



September 2014



September 2014

211 Backbite

Year First Identified: Adult in 1996

Year Last Identified: 2010

Identification

#211 was large with a uniformly brown coat. He had a distinctive muzzle and profile. His head was wide with a thin muzzle and a drooping lower lip. His claws were dark and his right ear drooped. This bear lacked a prominent shoulder hump. He had numerous scars on his back, face, and head, but none were distinctive.

#211 was confused with #6, especially in September and October. But #211's barrel-shape, medium-dark fur, and lack of a prominent shoulder hump set him apart.

Life History

#211 was first described as an adult male in 1996. He was regularly seen in July at Brooks Falls and he also returned to the Brooks River in September. He preferred to fish in the jacuzzi and often sat in the water to eat his fish. He was also observed napping in the water above Brooks Falls after fishing for salmon. In the fall, he was often seen at dawn and dusk.

Adult Male



July 2002



June 2010



September 2009

216 Marilyn

Year First Identified: Subadult in 1996

Year Last Identified: 2008

Number of Known Litters: 3

Identification

#216 was a medium-sized adult female. She had a prominent shoulder hump, a shaggy dark blond coat, and blond ears. Her muzzle was straight and the long hairs on her chin gave her a bearded appearance.

Life History

#216 was observed along the Brooks River every year from 1996 to 2008. She fished at the falls and the lower river area, and appeared habituated to humans. She was sometimes aggressive towards other bears and had been observed bluff charging bears beneath the Falls Platform. DNA analysis confirmed she is the mother of females #790 and #854. Compare the faces of #216 and #854 and you may see the resemblance between these bears.

Beginning in 1998, #216 raised several litters of cubs, but only kept them through two summer seasons. She was not observed caring for cubs into their third summer. In 2005, she arrived at Brooks with four spring cubs but by the end of the summer season in 2006, she had only two left from this litter.

Adult Female



June 2003



July 2007



September 2006

218 Ugly

Year First Identified: Young adult in 2001

Year Last Identified: 2013

Identification

#218 was a medium-large bear with a dark blond coat that was lighter towards his head. When shedding, his coat was patchy with dark, bare spots. He had blond, wide-set ears, and dark claws. His dark eyes contrasted with his coat and #218 had a short blocky nose. In late September 2010, he had a large wound on his left rear leg. In 2011, he had a large, round scar in this area.

Life History

#218 used some of the most efficient fishing techniques at Brooks Falls. He had been observed fishing successfully almost anywhere, but seemed to prefer fishing in the plunge pools below the falls, especially the jacuzzi. After catching many fish, he would often eat only the fattiest, most calorie rich parts of the fish (brains, roe, skin) and leave the carcass for scavenging bears and other animals.

When first described as a young adult male in 2001, he fished anywhere he could fit in but was easily displaced by larger bears. Later in his life, he became one of the more dominant bears at Brooks Falls. He was responsible for the scar on #489's left hip.

In 2009, he arrived at Brooks Falls with numerous small wounds presumably received while fighting other bears over his preferred fishing spots.

Adult Male



July 2013



September 2012



July 2008

219 One Toe

Year First Identified: Adult in 1997

Year Last Identified: 2008

Identification

#219 was distinctive and easily identifiable due to numerous large scars on his head, face, neck, and body. His claws were white and he was missing the outermost claw on his left front foot, hence his nickname. In early summer, his coat was reddish-brown, and in the fall, his coat turned dark brown covering most of his scars.

Life History

In October 2008, during an event rarely seen, park biologists observed #219 dying in the Brooks River from unknown but apparently natural causes. He was seen coughing up blood before he died in the river (see the photo at lower right from October 2008). His body eventually washed into Naknek Lake and disappeared.

#219 is another bear that apparently never habituated to humans and rarely approached the Falls Platform when people were present. In late summer and fall, he was sometimes seen in the lower river. He fished the riffles downstream of the Brooks Falls and regularly stole fish from other bears. Some of his scarring reflected this behavior.

DNA analysis confirmed that he is the father of #604 and #608.

Adult Male



July 2007



July 2006



#219 hemorrhaging blood in October 2008

234 Evander

Year First Identified: Adult in 1996

Year Last Identified: 2010

Identification

This bear was tall with tan claws and a short, blocky muzzle. He was easily recognize, along the Brooks River, due to his missing left ear. He lost his left ear late in 2001 or in the spring of 2002.

Life History

#234 was predictable in his fishing activities, almost always fishing the lip of the falls and less frequently in the far pool. Like #6 and #16, he appeared to be one of the oldest bears that frequented the Brooks River. In 2009 and 2010, he showed visible signs of aging. In 2009, he arrived looking very thin with a swollen front paw. Visitors with binoculars saw that his teeth were worn to the gums.

In the past, most bears that fished the lip of the falls yielded space to #234 when he approached, but this was no longer the case in 2009 and 2010. During those summers, #234 more readily yielded to younger, more dominant males.

Adult Male



July 2003



July 2000 #234 with two ears



September 2006

236 Milkshake

Year First Identified: Adult in 1997

Year Last Identified: 2011

Number of Known Litters: 5

Identification

#236 was a large adult female with a relatively large shoulder hump and a round, filled in body. Her coat was medium-brown in July and in the fall. She had the classic grizzly/brown bear dish-shaped face, a rectangular muzzle, and lighter, wide-set ears.

Life History

When last seen in 2011, #236 was one of the older adult females to frequent the Brooks River. She fished the lower river and the lip of the falls. She was first identified in 1997 caring for two spring cubs. Since then, she had at least four more litters. Records from the past 20 years indicated that she was one of the most fertile and successful female bears to use the Brooks River. DNA analysis has confirmed that she is the mother of #604 and #608.

In 2003, #236 was seen with four spring cubs, which is unusual for any sow. Remarkably, she returned in 2010 with four spring cubs, her fifth known litter, but by the end of August 2011, she has lost the entire 2010 litter. The specific causes of her cubs' deaths remains unknown. #236 probably lost her cubs to a variety of factors.

Older females who are raising a litter of cubs may have higher mortality rates than younger, single females. As one of the older sows with cubs in the Brooks River area, a lean salmon run in 2011 may have taxed #236 beyond her physical limits and left her unable to support and defend cubs.

In Katmai's movie, The Ends of the Earth: Alaska Wild Peninsula, #236 is the adult female with a litter of four cubs.

Adult Female



July 2008



June 2008



October 2002

247 Snaggletooth

Year First Identified: Adult in 1994

Year Last Identified: 2009

Identification

#247 was a medium-sized bear with a rectangular muzzle, tan-tipped claws, a brown coat, and wide-set ears. His most identifying characteristic was his distinctive, protruding lower left canine tooth.

Life History

As early as 2000 observers at Brooks River reported that his namesake tooth had “been this way for many years” and it did not seem to affect his ability to fish. He fished the far pool and never seemed to approach the platform side of the river. #247 was not seen in areas of high human use.

Although it can never be known for sure, his distinctive tooth may have been the result of a fight with another bear. During intense fights, bears will sometimes lock jaws and vigorously twist their heads and neck in an attempt to injure their opponent. #247’s tooth could have been snapped free from it’s roots during such a bout.

The video of #247 at lower right shows him as a thin and slow moving bear in October 2009. Unseen injuries and illness can often prevent bears from feeding properly during the critical fall months. Thin bears may even starve to death in the den.

Adult Male



October 2002



July 2007



September 2006

403 Egberta

Year First Identified: 3.5 year-old subadult in 2003

Year Last Identified: 2007

Number of Known Litters: 1

Identification

#403 was a large female with a blond coat that darkened to reddish-brown in the fall. Her facial profile revealed a straight Roman nose resembling a polar or black bear rather than the classic dish-shaped face of a brown/grizzly bear.

Life History

As a subadult and young female, #403 successfully learned to use multiple fishing styles, including diving. She would not only dive for salmon, but also salmon eggs. In July, #403 fished the lip of the falls and stole fish. #402 and #403 are siblings. While #402 frequently uses the Brooks River area, #403 has not been seen at all since 2007.

Adult Female



October 2002



#403 (top) in July 2007 with her 2.5 year-old cub



September 2006

408 CC

Year First Identified: Older subadult or young adult in 2001

Year Last Identified: 2010

Number of Known Litters: 1

Identification

#408 was a medium-sized adult female with a dark blond to blond coat. She had light blond ears and a long and slightly upturned muzzle. She had a crooked claw on her left front foot, hence her nickname. #408 was easily confused with #409 who also has light blond ears and a similar body and shape.

Life History

#408 was first identified as a young adult female in 2001. Her behavior that year hinted at subadult, but she was pursued by male bears and had scars on the back of her neck, possibly from mating. She was first observed with cubs in 2005. She was very attentive to these three cubs and occasionally charged other bears that were simply walking by. She raised this litter into their third summer.

Both #408 and #409 are remarkably similar in appearance, especially late in the season. It is suspected that these two bears are siblings. #408 fished the riffles below Brooks Falls and in the lower river area.

Adult Female



September 2004



July 2010



June 2007

415

Adult Female

Year First Identified: Young adult in 2001

Year Last Identified: 2012

Number of Known Litters: 2

Identification

#415 was a medium-small adult female. #415 had a uniformly brown coat and a short straight muzzle. She had no distinctive scars.

Life History

#415 wasn't easy to identify by appearances alone. Her behavior, more than her physical features, was the key to identifying her. She was very aggressive with other bears when fishing the lip of the falls. Even with her smaller stature, she would often force larger bears to back down to retain her preferred fishing spot. She was even seen chasing #480 out of the far pool. When fishing for salmon on the lip of the falls, she almost continuously bobbed her head.

July 2004



July 2012



September 2008

418 Jack

Year First Identified: Adult in 2001

Year Last Identified: 2011

Identification

#418 had a compact, medium-large body, and a brown coat that became lighter towards the front. He also had a dark claws, a small, but distinctive, scar above his right eye, and a short, stocky and dog-like muzzle.

Life History

While fishing, #418 often plunged quickly into the river. He usually fished the jacuzzi and far pool. In the past, he used to regularly fish at Brooks Falls in July, but was not seen during the fall months. However, this pattern was broken in more recent years, and #418 returned for brief visits in October 2009, October 2010, and September 2011.

Adult Male



July 2004



July 2009



September 2011

420 Genghis

Year First Identified: Adult in 2001

Year Last Identified: 2010

Identification

#420 was easy to identify due to his protruding teeth on his lower-right jaw. Otherwise, he was a long, large-bodied bear with a blocky muzzle, rusty brown coat, tan-brown claws, and a floppy left ear. He was confused with #247, but that bear is smaller and only has one protruding canine tooth on his left jaw.

Life History

#420 was aggressive around other bears and regularly stole fish. In 2005, he was seen with a very large, open wound on the left front leg that eventually healed and scarred over. In 2007, he returned to the Brooks River with a broken lower jaw and large, open wounds on both sides of his body. The jaw injury appeared to affect his ability to chew and swallow fish that he caught. However, he showed signs of rapid healing, both from the jaw injury and the wounds on his body. In 2009 and 2010, he was one of the more dominant bears fishing at Brooks Falls.

Even though #420 was typically very dominant at Brooks Falls, he did not appear to be habituated to humans and rarely approached the Falls Platform side of the river.

Adult Male



July 2007



June 2004



July 2003

438 Flo

Year First Identified: 1999

Year last Identified: 2013

Number of Known Litters: 2

Identification

#438 was a medium-sized female with a blond coat. Her coat only darkened slightly in the fall. She also had wide-set and large blond ears as well as a grooved muzzle. Her claws were distinctly white.

Life History

#438 was first classified as an adult female in 1999, but older records suggest she was likely raising yearling cubs in 1997. She raised her first confirmed litter into their third summer. In 2010, she kept her most recent litter into their fourth summer. It is rare for bears in Katmai to care for offspring this long.

In 2004, #438 and her cubs directly approached an angler with a fish on his line. Within 30 minutes, the family group moved downstream and they obtained a bagged fish from an angler who had dumped it on the beach as the family rapidly approached. In 2009, she and her two cubs obtained garbage from the incinerator building at Brooks Camp. After receiving this reward, they frequently investigated the buildings near camp and were difficult to haze away. Help keep bears from learning these behaviors. Store all food and garbage securely. Stay alert at all times and stop fishing well before a bear approaches within 50 yards.

Adult Female



July 2012



July 2006



September 2011

468 Reggie

Year First Identified: Adult female in 1999

Year Last Identified: 2009

Number of Known Litters: 3

Identification

#468 was a medium-sized and sometimes fat female. She had a light brown, uniformly colored coat that darkened in the fall. Her facial features were easy to recognize. She had a drooping lower lip, a long muzzle, and a prominent brow ridge.

Life History

#468 was first observed and classified as an adult female with one spring cub in 1999. In 2007, she returned to the Brooks River with one spring cub marking her third litter. She is the mother of #708 and grandmother of #284. #468 fished the oxbow, lower river area, and far pool at the falls.

Adult Female



October 2004



July 2004



September 2003

489 Ted

Year First Identified: Subadult in 2001

Year Last Identified: 2013

Identification

#489 was easily recognizable because of a large, distinctive scar on his left hip. He was a medium-large bear. His coat was light brown and often patchy when shedding, but was darker in September. He had a slightly drooping lower lip, dark eye rings, and dark claws. His ears were large, upright, and triangle shaped. His nickname, Ted, is short for “triangle-eared.”

Life History

#489 was classified as a subadult when first identified in 2001. In 2007, he received a wound on his left hip during a brief altercation with #218 (see video below). While the wound he received looked vicious, it healed and scarred over, and was this bear’s most identifiable mark.

From 2008-2013 he was one of the very few bears regularly seen fishing the river in mid-August. During these periods he repeatedly entered Brooks Camp, something most adult males do not do regularly.

#489 often begged for fish from other bears, sometimes very vocally. He was one of the few adult bears to show this behavior. Other bears would not give #489 fish, but this technique did put him in a good position to access discarded fish remains.

Adult Male



August 2007



August 2013



July 2010

500 Indy

Year First Identified: 2.5 year-old subadult in 2014
Year Last Identified: 2015

Identification

#500 was a small adult with very blond fur in July. By September, her fur darkened to a dark and mottled blond. When shedding, she had a noticeable circular shed patch on her forehead. She also had large upright ears.

Life History

When this bear first arrived in July 2014, #500 was often seen with another blond bear of similar size and color. Sibling bears sometimes associate with one another for days, weeks, or months after their mother pushes them away. In rarer instances, siblings may even den together the following fall after they become independent. This may explain why #500 was seen with the other bear. Her suspected sibling, however, was not seen after early July of that year.

#500 was believed to be the offspring of #409. She was one of the smallest independent bears at Brooks River and as such faced challenges posed by other bears. In 2015, she would visit Brooks Falls, but could not compete for fishing spots. #500 found an abundant supply of food by scavenging dead fish even though she was often displaced by older, larger bears.

As part of the growing pains of subadulthood, she would often challenge and/or approach larger bears. Many of these bears ignored her, but some would vigorously chase her away—even cubs from other litters. In these situations, she was likely just testing her limits and was constantly reminded of her place in the hierarchy at the time: the bottom.

Adult Female



July 2016



August 2015



July 2016



September 2014



July 2015



July 2014



August 2014

604 Little

Year First Identified: 2.5 year-old subadult in 2002

Year Last Identified: 2007

Identification

In July 2007, #604 had a large open wound on his right hind leg, which was a diagnostic feature at the time. Otherwise, he was a medium-sized young adult bear with wide-set ears and a somewhat straight nose. #604 had a brown coat with a darker head and dark claws. He had longer fur under his chin which resembled a beard or goatee.

Life History

The 2017 wound on 604's right hind leg was large and deep enough that muscle tissue was visible through the skin and fatty layers. After receiving this injury his behavior changed and he became a more passive bear, often begging for scraps.

According to observations by bear biologists and DNA analysis, he is the offspring of #236 and sibling of #608. This bear fished the lip of Brooks Falls and scavenged for scraps below it. Before 2007, he was infrequently seen at Brooks during the fall months.

Adult Male



July 2007



#604 sustained a deep laceration in July 2007



June 2004

608

Adult Female

Year First Identified: 2.5 year-old subadult in 2002

Year Last Identified: 2010

Number of Known Litters: 2

Identification

#608 had a small to medium-sized body and a dark blond coat. The long fur around her neck gave her mane and forehead a fluffy appearance. She also had dark claws and a long muzzle.

Life History

DNA analysis confirmed that she was the offspring of #236 and #219 and the sibling of #604. #608 was raised in the Brooks River area. She frequently fished the lower river and used the area around camp which indicated some level of human-habituation, but she was a defensive mother around people.

She and her first litter of cubs obtained play rewards in the form of unattended property on the lodge porch, cabin porches, and from boats. There is good evidence that she also obtained play rewards from humans when she was a cub. While #608 was not a “problem” bear, her past behavior, especially with cubs, highlights the importance of maintaining appropriate distances as well as storing all equipment properly so that bears don’t learn to associate our possessions as toys. Bears have long memories. If #608 got unintentional toys from people when she was a cub, that may have made her more likely to investigate our possessions and teach that behavior to her own offspring.

[Watch a video of #608’s yearling cubs play with a basketball.](#)



July 2010



July 2007



June 2004

744 Dent

Year First Identified: 2.5 year-old subadult in 2004

Year last identified: 2013

Number of Known Litters: 0

Identification

#744 had a small, thin body. Her summer coat was blond to light brown in color. She often shed most of her coat by the end of July. She had large, triangular ears, dark claws with lighter tips, and her head and feet appeared large in proportion to her body.

Life History

This bear appeared to tolerate other bears, even large males. She would approach large males at the falls in hopes of picking up any fish scraps they left behind. She had not been observed with cubs, but had shown signs of estrus. #744 seemed habituated to people and was often seen on the beach in front of camp and near the bridge.

Adult Female



July 2012



September 2012



#744 as a subadult in August 2006

790 Weevil

Year First Identified: 3.5 year-old subadult in 2005

Year Last Identified: 2009

Number of Known Litters: 0

Identification

This was a medium-small adult female with skinny legs. #790 had a long, shaggy light brown coat, a straight facial profile, and small ears in proportion to her head. She resembled #216 and was often confused with #854.

Life History

When first identified in 2005, #790 was classified as a subadult and estimated to be 3.5 years old at that time. She was often seen fishing in the lower river. DNA analysis identified #216 and #24 as her parents and #854 as her sibling.

Adult Female



July 2007



July 2008



September 2007

814 Lurch

Year First Identified: Young adult in 2005

Year Last Identified: 2016

Identification

#814 was one of the most distinctive bears at Brooks River. He was very large and had a missing his right ear. His muzzle was long and he had a distinctive scar above his right eye. In June and July, his back had a pronounced saddle and was sometimes noticeably shed out. Late in the summer, his new coat was a uniform dark brown. Like #856, #814 was often seen repeatedly licking his lips while he fished and walked around Brooks Falls.

Life History

#814 was described as a young adult male when he was first identified in 2005. At that time, he typically fished the riffles, cut bank area, and scavenged salmon carcasses at Brooks Falls. Since 2008, however, this bear became increasingly dominant. He would steal fish and regularly displaced other bears from his preferred fishing spots. #814 was one of the most dominant bears on the river and only consistently yielded to #856 and #747.

He was observed killing #435's spring cub in June 2009. In October 2012, #814 was seen guarding a food cache near the mouth of the Brooks River. Later observations determined that he was guarding and feeding on a dead bear. It is unknown whether or not #814 killed the bear he was feeding on. He likely appropriated the cache from #469 who was seen digging in the same spot. He also appropriated a food cache containing another dead bear in October 2013. For bears like #814, calories are calories. It makes no difference whether or not the calories come from salmon or another bear. #814's actions demonstrate the successful survival skills of a dominant bear.

#814 apparently had his right ear torn off in the spring of 2015. How and when did this happen? No one knows, but the wound around his ear and right side of his face appeared very fresh when he was first seen in mid June 2015. He likely was injured in a fight with another bear, but this is not known with certainty.

In August 2016, remains of a bear was found on an angler trail behind the Brooks Falls Platform. The dental remains when compared with photos of #814's teeth showed a striking resemblance. #814 was not seen after late July. It is not certain whether the skeletal remains belong to #814, but the evidence indicates his death.

Adult Male



July 2015



October 2014



July 2016



October 2014



July 2012



July 2006



September 2011

864 Norman

Year First Identified: 2006

Year Last Identified: 2007 (possibly)

Identification

#864 was a very large male, but his body did not appear to be well filled out like many other large males. His coat was dark brown, his muzzle was blocky and scarring was usually visible on his forehead. The whites of his eyes were often visible giving him a distinctive look.

Life History

#864 was identified in July 2006, but was certainly a large, mature adult at that time. When present, he was arguably the most dominant bear along the Brooks River in July, even fighting and displacing #24. During the rare instances when he was seen, #864 did not acknowledge other bears while fishing. This is common behavior for very dominant bears.

In 2007, he was only observed by bear biologists on overnight surveys which suggests he developed little to no habituation towards people. It is possible this bear visited Brooks Falls briefly in July 2014 (see photo at lower right). If it was #864, he was no longer the dominant bear that he used to be. #747 quickly chased him away from the falls area.

Adult Male



July 2006



July 2006



This photo was taken in July 2014. Is it #864?

868 Wayne Brother

Year First Identified: Subadult in 2006

Year Last Identified: 2015

Identification

#868 had a medium-sized body with a light brown or blond coat, and a grooved, medium length muzzle. His ears were wide-set, triangular, and very blond. When shedding, he had a distinct vase-shaped patch around his tail area. In 2014, he had a large scar on the top of his left hip that is similar in its size, shape, and location to #489's diagnostic scar. In the fall, his coat was dark blond but he retained a blondish muzzle and ears.

Life History

#868 was first classified as a subadult in 2006. His mother is believed to be #438 and is the sibling of #83. This bear is often fished on the lip of Brooks Falls, but also anywhere else he could find space. When he and #83 fished Brooks Falls at the same time, #868 was certainly less dominant than his brother.

#868 died on the shore of Naknek Lake at the outlet of Brooks River in late October 2015. Wildlife technicians collected organ and tissue samples and performed a basic field necropsy. No signs of trauma were found. Tissue samples were too badly decomposed for the lab to analyze. His skull was collected for future educational use.

[View photos of the field necropsy](#) (some photos are graphic).

Adult Male



July 2015



This is how park staff found #868 in late October 2015.



#868 as a subadult in July 2006

Learn More About the Brooks River Bears

There are many resources available to those who wish to learn more about Brooks River, the brown bears who inhabit it, and Katmai National Park and Preserve.

[Katmai Terrane Blog](#)—Learn about Katmai through the eyes of a National Park Ranger. Blog posts range in topic from bears to bugs and everything in between.

[Katmai Bearcams Wiki Page](#)—Keep up to date on what bears have

been seen on the cams, catch videos, see pictures, and contribute your own content to the online bearcam community.

[Katmai NPS Webpage](#)—Get info on trip planning to Katmai, learn about bear safety, download a free copy of the park’s official newspaper, and more.

[Explore.org Bearcams](#)—During summer and fall watch live wild brown bears fish for salmon, compete for mates, and struggle to survive. During winter months, watch highlights from the previous season.

[Explore Bears Youtube Channel](#) (explore.org)—The best place to find live ranger chat replays and hours of “play-by-play” re-runs.

[Katmai Social Media](#)—Facebook, Twitter, Periscope, Google+, Flickr, Youtube—Stay up to date with what’s happening in the park and learn fun facts about the plants and animals that live here.

[Explore.org Bearcam Chat](#)—Scroll down and discuss what’s happening on the bearcams with other viewers. Chat with rangers about the bears and more. Weekly during summer months.



A bear cub swims among spawning salmon.

