

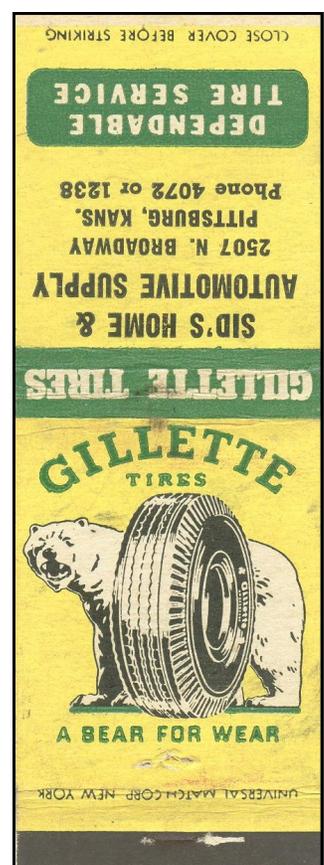
Just The Bear Facts!

>There are eight species of bears alive today that range in size from the large brown bears and polar bears, which can weigh as much as 2200 and 1500 pounds respectively, to the comparatively smaller giant pandas and sun bears, which weigh less than 300 pounds apiece.

>The earliest known true bear is *Ursavus elemensis*, also known as the dawn bear. It was a small, dog-sized bear that inhabited subtropical forests throughout Europe during the Miocene. The dawn bear is believed to be the ancestor of all eight living bear species. Scientists believe that about 10 million years ago, *Ursavus elemensis* gave rise to *Protursus simpsoni*, a now-extinct genus of bears that gave rise to the modern bear family, *Ursus*.

>Six of the eight species of bears are classified as vulnerable or threatened with extinction. The giant panda is the most threatened of all bear species, with only 1600 remaining individuals. Giant pandas are classified as Endangered by the IUCN. The sun bear, the smallest of the bear species, is classified as Vulnerable, as is the Andean bear, the sloth bear, the Asiatic black bear and the polar bear. Brown bears and black bears are classified as Least Concern and are considered to be outside of immediate risk of extinction at this time.

>The largest of all bear species is the brown bear. They can weigh as much as 2200 pounds. The size of brown bears varies between the sexes and among the



subspecies. Males are significantly heavier than females and the Kodiak bear, *Ursus arctos middendorfi*, is considered to be the largest of all the subspecies of brown bears. Kodiak bears inhabit the Kodiak Archipelago in South-Western Alaska.

>Bears in northern regions go into winter sleep. They do not go into true hibernation. During the winter, their body temperatures do not drop significantly. For this reason, many scientists do not classify this state as true hibernation, but instead refer to it as winter sleep or winter lethargy.

>Polar bears are the most skilled swimmers of all bear species. They live in regions that border the Arctic Ocean and hunt on polar ice floes throughout the winter, swimming between ice chunks when needed in pursuit of prey such as seals, fish, and walrus. Polar bears can swim 3-6 miles per hour.

>Bears have plantigrade paws with non-retractile claws. They walk in a manner such that their entire foot makes contact with the ground. This foot configuration is referred to as plantigrade locomotion and is also common in primates (including humans) as well. Other plantigrade animals include kangaroos, mice, raccoons, and hedgehogs. A bear's plantigrade gait can be contrasted with the digitigrade gait foot of a dog (which walks on its digits) and the unguligrade foot of a deer (which walks on the tips of its toes).

>The koala is not a bear, it is a marsupial. It's called a 'koala bear' due to its slight resemblance to a teddy bear. It's an arboreal marsupial that lives in Australia. [<http://animals.about.com/od/bears/a/bear-facts.htm>]

