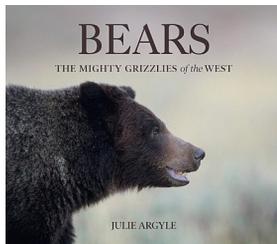


ZOOLOGY

Bears: the Mighty Grizzlies of the West

By Julie Argyle. 2021. Gibbs Smith. 224 pages, 50.00 USD, Cloth.

Bears is a beautiful coffee table book that contains an impressive 190 glossy, colour pictures of Grizzly Bears (*Ursus arctos horribilis*) from Yellowstone National Park. It is a large (26.0×2.4×30.6 cm), heavy (4 pounds [just under 2 kg]) book that is meant to be gazed at in admiration. *Bears* gives us the pleasure of peeking into the detailed lives of these remarkable animals. Fans of Yellowstone, nature, bears, the western USA, national parks, and predators will enjoy reading about this iconic bruin, which is a symbol of wilderness and brute strength.



I have had the recent privilege of reading very personal accounts of Gray Wolves (*Canis lupus*) in Yellowstone (e.g., Way 2019, 2020). This tome follows that trend for Brown Bears—as the species is officially referred to, with Grizzly Bear denoting the *horribilis* subspecies—in one of the world's first national parks. This great bear can live up to 34 years in the wild (p. 45), and many have become local celebrities over the course of their lifetime. Each bear has a distinct personality and, as is the case with people, they have unique and distinguished identities (p. 123).

Accordingly, many of the chapters in *Bears* focus on individuals, and show awe-inspiring images of them. We get to know Raspberry, 791, Snow, Snaggletooth, and The Obsidian Sow in full photographic detail. Raspberry is Argyle's favourite and she dedicates the book to that ursid. The sow, born in 2007 (p. 125), still inhabits the northern shores of Yellowstone Lake. She has raised cubs in full view of people, including one called Snow. She—and other female bruins—often do that, people speculate, to avoid male bears, who stay away from the roads and people (p. 125). Male bears—also referred to

as boars—sometimes kill cubs that aren't theirs, so there is an acute reason for the females to circumvent them. I enjoyed reading Argyle's personal stories of the bears, and seeing prints emanating from those accounts was really cool. For instance, watching Raspberry walking along the shore of Yellowstone Lake was amazing, especially because I have driven by there so many times (without seeing a bear on the shoreline). Seeing Snaggletooth's genetic defect (pp. 190–191), the missing part of his mouth, was bizarre. Observing the large, 500-pound (227-kg) boar 791 on a large bull Elk that he killed was awesome, especially because the incident made international news in 2020 (pp. 153–156). Lastly, gazing at the many images of the very adorable and light-coloured female bear named Snow (pp. 163–189) was special, and tear-jerking for Argyle to watch as the adolescent transitioned to living on her own when Raspberry chased her away at 3.5 years of age.

In addition to focussing on individual bruins, Argyle discusses bear relationships with Native Americans. Many tribes view the grizzly as a sacred animal and consider them brothers (p. 17). They were offended by calls to have them hunted and shot as trophies when they were removed from the list of species protected under the *Endangered Species Act* (ESA; p. 21). Rather, they believe the grizzly is a great and powerful spirit who is a gift to Mother Earth and her people (p. 18). Some tribes even have a bear dance, which they believe brings the spirits of their ancestors back (p. 18).

Grizzly Bears have made a remarkable recovery and are considered a success story (p. 30). Stable populations exist in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and around Glacier National Park. But there are still many factors that influence their survival, so it is fortunate that judges have kept Grizzly Bears on the ESA despite numerous attempts to remove them from being federally protected. A fraction of the original 50

000 bears in the western USA still inhabit this country (p. 75), and being listed under the ESA currently prevents states from instituting hunting seasons on the great beasts. This has also allowed their population and range to continue to increase, albeit tenuously (pp. 55–56). However, there are still long-term issues associated with fluctuating and diminishing food sources, climate change, and the potentially harsh treatment of these bears by western states outside of national parks. The majority of bear deaths are human-caused (pp. 79, 193), which means that we must remain vigilant to ensure their populations stay sustainable.

We learn in *Bears* that grizzlies are super-hibernators, because their breathing slows down greatly and their heart rate drops significantly during their five month long fasting period where they do not eat, drink, defecate, or urinate (p. 91). Remarkably, cubs are born in the den in January to February, while the females are still sleeping (p. 93). This is an extraordinary adaptation to survive harsh winters. As food sources become available, grizzlies awaken in the spring with boars leaving first and females with cubs last (p. 93).

Bears: the Mighty Grizzlies of the West was very easy to read. There is not much text in this book. I started it on a Saturday afternoon and read over half of it within a couple of hours, then finished it the next morning in even less time. I didn't mind how quick of a read it was, because the purpose of the book is to be a photo-essay of this powerful species. There are only minor typos in the book. One complaint I have is that there are no maps. Showing the current range of the Grizzly Bear in the USA would have been helpful to

the average reader. The bears were historically found throughout the western USA, but most bears currently live in a couple of large, core populations situated within Glacier, Yellowstone, and Grand Teton National Parks, with isolated and much smaller numbers outside of those protected areas. Framing where the author took the pictures compared to the species' overall range would have been insightful. Also, the book was relatively pricey, at \$50 USD. However, this price might be expected given the book's large dimensions, length (over 200 pages), and paper quality, using 100% glossy paper for all sheets.

Overall, I greatly enjoyed the book. It was well worth my time. Then again, it is difficult for me to not like something that is Yellowstone-based, especially when it involves animals, and specifically a large powerful predator like the Grizzly Bear. I will continue to follow Argyle's work, which can be found on social media and through her photography business (Wild Love Images), as well as in published materials.

Literature Cited

- Way, J. 2019. [Book Review] *The Rise of Wolf 8: Witnessing the Triumph of Yellowstone's Underdog*, by Rick McIntyre. *Canadian Field-Naturalist* 133: 180–181. <https://doi.org/10.22621/cfn.v133i2.2407>
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