

Nelson County Black Bear

PATIENT: Black Bear, #12-0073

LOCATION OF RESCUE: Nelson County, VA

CONDITION: Thin

ADMISSION DATE: February 9, 2012

PROGNOSIS: Fair

In early February, a homeowner in Afton, Virginia saw a young bear hanging around on his property. On February 9, several days after seeing the lone bear, the man was able to contain the small yearling in a barrel. He contacted the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, and the state bear biologist traveled to Afton to assess the situation. The bear biologist then transported the bear to the Wildlife Center.



Upon admission, Black Bear #12-0073 was settled into an enclosure in the Center's holding room and received a brief preliminary examination. Dr. Adam Naylor observed the alert bear for a few moments and noted that the bear's right eye appeared to be abnormal. The staff were able to obtain a weight on the young male Black Bear – it weighed in at just 3.94 kgs [8.67 lbs]. The bear is very underweight for its age; yearlings typically weigh at least 40 – 60 pounds.

On February 10, Dr. Adam and team sedated and anesthetized the bear for a physical examination, radiographs, and blood work. No apparent injuries were found on the bear's body, and radiographs had no significant findings. Dr. Adam and Dr. Dave were able to assess the bear's right eye more closely under anesthesia. They found that the bear is completely blind in that eye — while it's difficult to interpret what happened, the veterinarians think that he may either have had a congenital issue, or an old injury that has healed. The globe of the bear's eye is still present, but the other parts of the eye are difficult to discern. There have been known reports of one-eyed Black Bears doing fine in the wild, so the team hopes that this will not be an issue for the cub.

Anesthetizing the bear:



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Physical examination:



Blood work will be reviewed on the afternoon of February 10. At this point, the bear's main issue is that it is very thin. The team can't be sure why the yearling is under-sized and under-weight, but similar to the [Suffolk bear cub](#), he just needs some time to put on weight.

The bear will be observed in the Center's indoor holding facility for the next 24-48 hours, and then will be settled into the Center's bear pen.

February 13 update

The Black Bear yearling has been progressively brighter over the past few days. Initial blood work revealed that the bear was anemic and had low levels of protein in his blood — both consistent with starvation. The veterinary team gave the bear an iron injection on February 11 and have been giving the bear fluids each day. The rehabilitation staff started the bear on a soft, simple diet of dog food and small chunks of vegetables. The small cub has been eating well and has already put on 0.34 kg [about 0.75 lbs]!

The current plans is to build up the bear's feeding this week while he continues to live in the Center's holding room — this will enable him to gain weight before having to thermoregulate in an outdoor pen. Blood work will be rechecked on Thursday February 16.

February 15 update

The report from the veterinary team was that Black Bear #12-0073 was much brighter today — even a bit feisty! The veterinary team is continuing to catch the bear daily for an injection of vitamin-enriched fluids. As of this morning, the bear weighed in at 4.94 kg — exactly 1.0 kg more than his admission weight.

The veterinary team hopes to move the bear outside on February 17, pending positive results of additional blood work.

Photo by Jack Looney:



February 17 update

Blood was drawn from Black Bear #12-0073 on February 16. While the bear is still slightly anemic, this additional blood work showed marked signs of improvement. The yearling continues to eat well and remains bright, alert, and feisty. The rehabilitation staff set up one of the Bear Pen enclosures and the young bear will be moved outside later this afternoon.

The staff will continue to weigh the bear weekly — assuming they are able to safely do so — for the next couple of weeks.

February 20 update

The bear cub is adapting well to life outside in the bear pen – the rehabilitation staff report that the yearling bear continued to eat well throughout the weekend. A weigh-in has been scheduled for February 23.

February 23 update

The veterinary team was able to coax the Black Bear into a crate today for a weigh-in — and they report that he is feisty! Today's weight was 7.10 kg — a 1.74 kg [3.8 lbs] increase from last week. The bear continues to eat well and will be weighed again on March 8.

March 1 update

Over the past few days, the rehabilitation staff noticed that the young bear has been acting abnormally. When a staff member delivers the bear's food, the bear is often spotted sitting near the door of the bear pen – and doesn't run into the den when a human is around. Dr. Miranda went up to the bear pen with a rehabilitator on Thursday, March 1, and the bear behaved the same way.

Dr. Miranda attempted to startle the bear – a few hand claps and other noises – but the bear did not really react. When Dr. Miranda shook a nearby grate on the bear enclosure, the bear did move toward the den – while staying fairly close to the bear-pen wall.

At this point, the veterinary team isn't sure what the issue is – there are a number of possibilities. Dr. Miranda will be consulting with a board-certified ophthalmologist at Virginia Tech on Monday – she would like the ophthalmologist to examine the photos of the bear's eye to see if he has any opinions on what may have caused this eye issue. If the bear did experience some sort of head trauma, perhaps this has caused more than just an eye issue for the bear. Alternatively, the bear could still also be recovering from a prolonged time of malnutrition and poor health.

The team will continue to assess the bear regularly.

March 6 update

The veterinary team will be sedating Black Bear #12-0073 on the afternoon of Wednesday, March 7, for an additional set of radiographs, blood work, physical examination, and a weigh-in. In addition to the continued "odd" behavior, the rehabilitation staff have also spotted the bear occasionally limping. Dr. Miranda would like to get an additional set of radiographs focusing on the bear's hips to see if any issues are present.

Dr. Miranda also heard back from the board-certified ophthalmologist at Virginia Tech — after looking at photos, Dr. Pickett suspects that the bear did suffer from some sort of trauma, and its eye was damaged and the cornea scarred over. Depending on how the eye looks on Wednesday's physical exam, one possibility would be to remove the old globe of the eye entirely — ensuring that no infections will develop down the road. That will only occur if the bear seems otherwise healthy and no issues are present on the radiographs.

March 7 update

Black Bear #12-0073 was sedated today for additional radiographs and a physical examination — and he was not happy about it. Dr. Adam was pleased to see the bear act a little more aggressively than he did when he first came in.

Dr. Miranda reports that the bear's radiographs look good — no issues or abnormalities in the bear's bones. Blood work was also improved, and the bear weighed in at 11.05 kg this week. Dr. Adam noted that the bear is not just heavier — but he does appear larger compared to the weigh-in two weeks ago. The bear's eye is stable at this point, though Dr. Miranda will continue to consult with an ophthalmologist colleague to decide whether or not to remove the globe of the eye. The bears eardrums are intact. The biggest issue for the bear at the moment appears to be his poor hair coat and flaky skin. An additional skin scrape was taken this week to check again for ringworm.

At this point, the veterinarians aren't sure what is causing the slightly abnormal behavior with the bear — Dr. Miranda did note that the bear seemed oddly silent when they were sedating and waking him up. While the bear would make small "bluff charges" and swat at the door of the crate after he woke up — he did not make any noises, which seems different than past yearling bears that have been admitted to the Center.

The team will continue to closely monitor the bear as they are able.

March 15 update

Dr. Miranda and Dr. Pickett, a board-certified ophthalmologist at Virginia Tech, have continued to discuss Black Bear #12-0073's eye injury. Both vets have decided that it would be better to remove the globe of the bear's eye to prevent further infection. While there is a chance that the scarred cornea and globe may not become infected down the road, there is no "follow-up" with wild patients once they are released!

Dr. Pickett will be coming to the Wildlife Center to assist with the eye surgery on Tuesday, March 20. Performing the surgery now will allow the bear to recover and heal while the team continues to assess its behavior and the bear gains weight.

March 20 update

At about noon today, Black Bear #12-0073 was anesthetized for surgery. Dr. Miranda went up to the bear pen with a pole syringe so that she could inject a sedative into the bear's thigh. She reports that the bear was very wary of her — and it took a couple of rounds of sedative to get the bear comfortably knocked down. The bear still is not vocalizing — though otherwise is acting like a feisty little bear!

Once sedated, the bear was carried down to the hospital, where the veterinary team prepped the area for surgery. Dr. Phil Pickett, a board-certified ophthalmologist at Virginia Tech, drove up today to scrub in on the bear's eye surgery. Drs. Pickett, Miranda, and Adam report that the surgery went well — the small globe of the bear's eye was removed and the eyelid was sutured closed. Dr. Pickett will generously be arranging for a histopathology of the bear's eye for the Wildlife Center — meaning that the tissue will be sampled so that the staff will know if this was a traumatic injury or a congenital issue.

The only complication the bear suffered was that once mostly awake post-surgery, the bear's sutured eye began to bleed — at that point, the fast-acting (and strong) vet staff had to restrain the bear while applying pressure to the area for about 25 minutes. Once the veterinary team was satisfied that the bleeding had stopped, the bear was settled into a large, quiet, dark crate for continued recovery. The bear will move outdoors into the bear den later this evening.

The bear's weighed-in at 14.59 kg today.

Photos of the bear's surgery:

Masking the bear down for surgery:



Pre-surgery monitoring:



Shaved and prepped!



Front paws:



Post-surgery care with Dr. Pickett:



More post-surgical monitoring:



All sewed up!



Back foot:



March 21 update

Wildlife rehabilitator Suzy went up to the Center's bear pen first thing this morning to check on Black Bear #12-0073. The bear was locked in the small den portion of his enclosure last night after surgery — the veterinary team did not want the Black Bear moving around much. Suzy reports that the bear was up and active this morning, and his face is clean and free of debris. She opened the guillotine door to allow the bear back into the larger portion of the bear den — where the food is!

DGIF Bear Facts

Help us feed the bear! Your donation will help support the Center's life-saving work with this bear cub ... and with more than 2,500 wild animals in need.

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