

(62) ASPECTS OF FOOD-CONDITIONING OF GRIZZLY BEARS IN THE PRUDHOE BAY REGION, ALASKA

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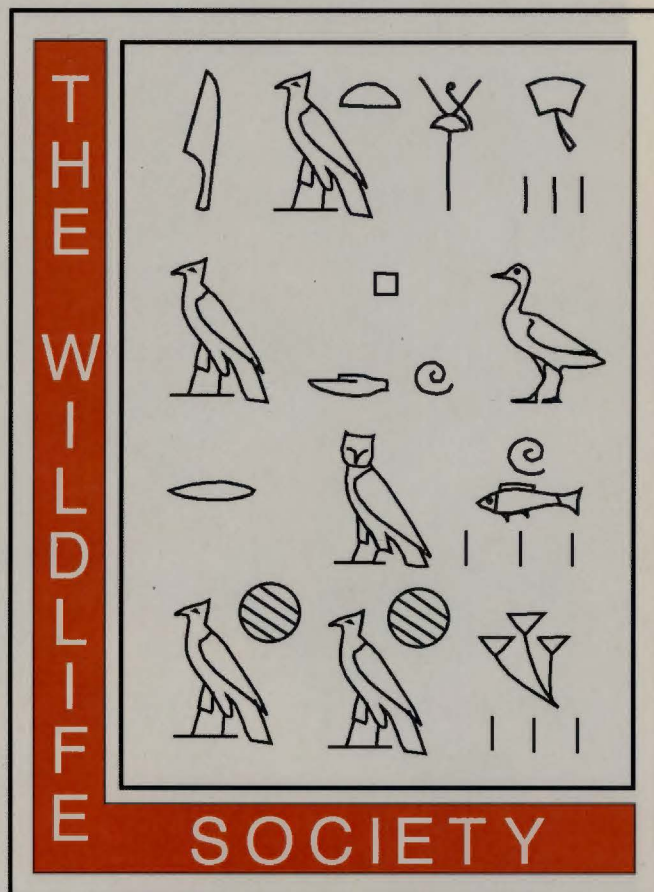
Abstract: Grizzly bears (*Ursus arctos*) reach their farthest north continuous distribution in North America in the region around the oilfields at Prudhoe Bay. Since 1991 we have monitored foraging habits of 106 radiotagged grizzly bears in the oilfields and adjacent environs, including 24 radiotagged bears that exhibited different levels of conditioning to anthropogenic food sources (“food-conditioned”). Contrary to the general perception that food-conditioning is equivalent to addiction, all food-conditioned bears continued to utilize natural foods to varying degrees in addition to the easily available garbage and human food in the oilfields. We compared the individual and demographic attributes of food-conditioned bears with the bears that fed only on naturally available foods. We examined relationships among mean weights and survivorship for sex and age classes (adult, sub-adult), and foraging strategy (food-conditioned vs. non food-conditioned).

We discuss our results in the context of a recent hypothesis by bear nutritional ecologists that the body size of bears is adapted to local food conditions, and when young bears greatly exceed the nutritional “set-point” by feeding on highly nutritious and easily available anthropogenic food sources it is physiologically difficult for them to successfully return to natural foods. We will discuss some management implications of our results and this hypothesis.



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