

## It's A Tough Year!

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With financial collapse and economic recession along with exploding public debt, you might be expecting a political rant. Not this time. I suspect we have heard enough pontificating about all of that for the moment.

The first year of a cub's life is reasonably comfortable. Newborn cubs (called spring cubs) stay close to mom who keeps a tight reign on things. She does her best to provide plenty of food and protection.

The cubs are taught to scamper up a tree at the first sign of trouble or concern. Occasionally, the mother bear will leave her cubs up a tree for several hours while off eating or sleeping. Trees becomes a safe and comfortable place for spring cubs. It is not uncommon to see these tiny guys climb so high the limbs sway back and forth in the wind. The cubs keep climbing until they find a comfortable spot to 'hang out' until mom returns.



Once mom makes her way back, they quickly climb down the tree to join her. This continues throughout the summer until fall when the spring cubs look healthy and ready for hibernation. Only about 40% of these cubs will survive the long winter heading their way, but for now, they are as they say, "Fat and Happy!"

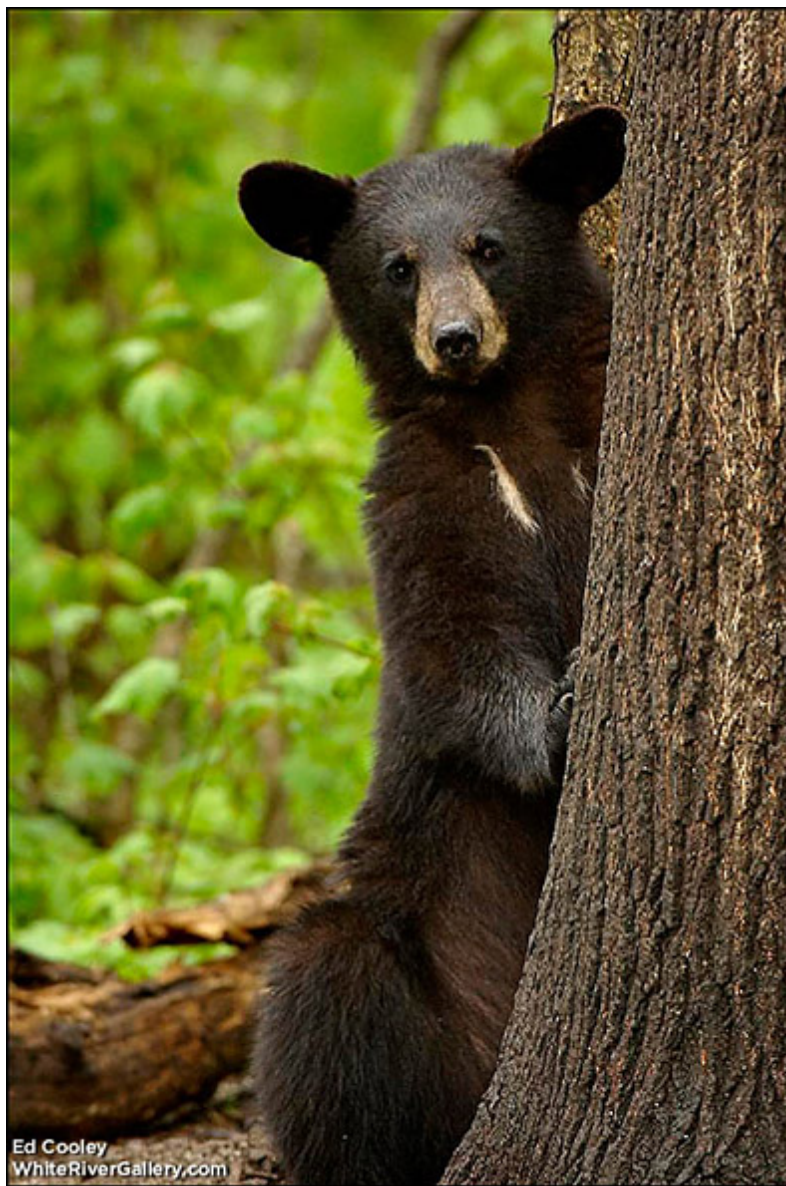
Spring arrives and those who survived are feeling pretty confident. Mom is much less dominant and the yearlings start to enjoy the new year. The mating season arrives in early summer and then it happens! The mother now wants nothing to do with her yearling and aggressively runs them off. In a moment, life has changed, big time! Suddenly, it's a tough year.

Needless to say, the yearlings are freaked out by this change. For the first few weeks, they are terrified of everything. Anytime another bear walks by or they are threatened in any way, they claw their way up the nearest tree which was their lifeline for the past year. It's not hard to tell when a new bear comes into the area. You can hear the scared huffing and claws scraping bark as they scamper up those trees.

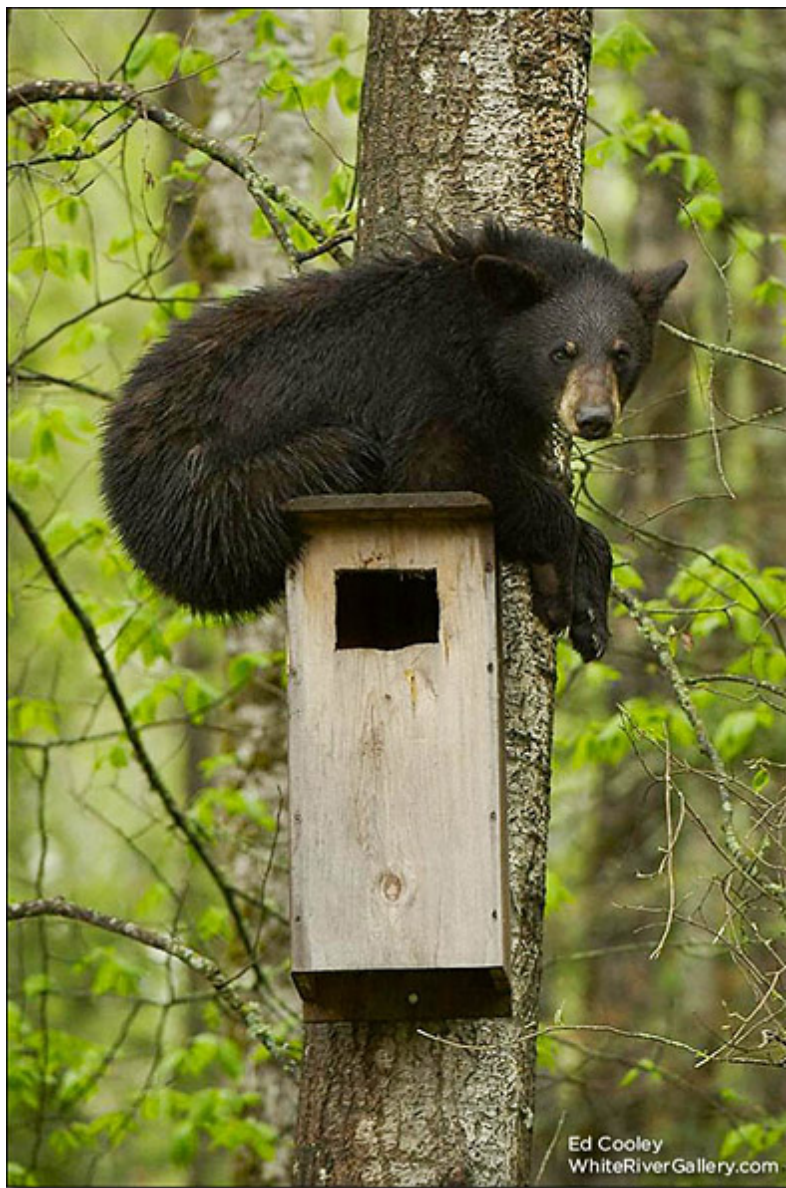


After a few weeks of clawing tooth and nail up a tree anytime they hear something approaching, only to climb back down a moment later, the fear begins to subside into curiosity. Most bear encounters occur at this stage because the bears become curious and some start to develop more dominant personalities.



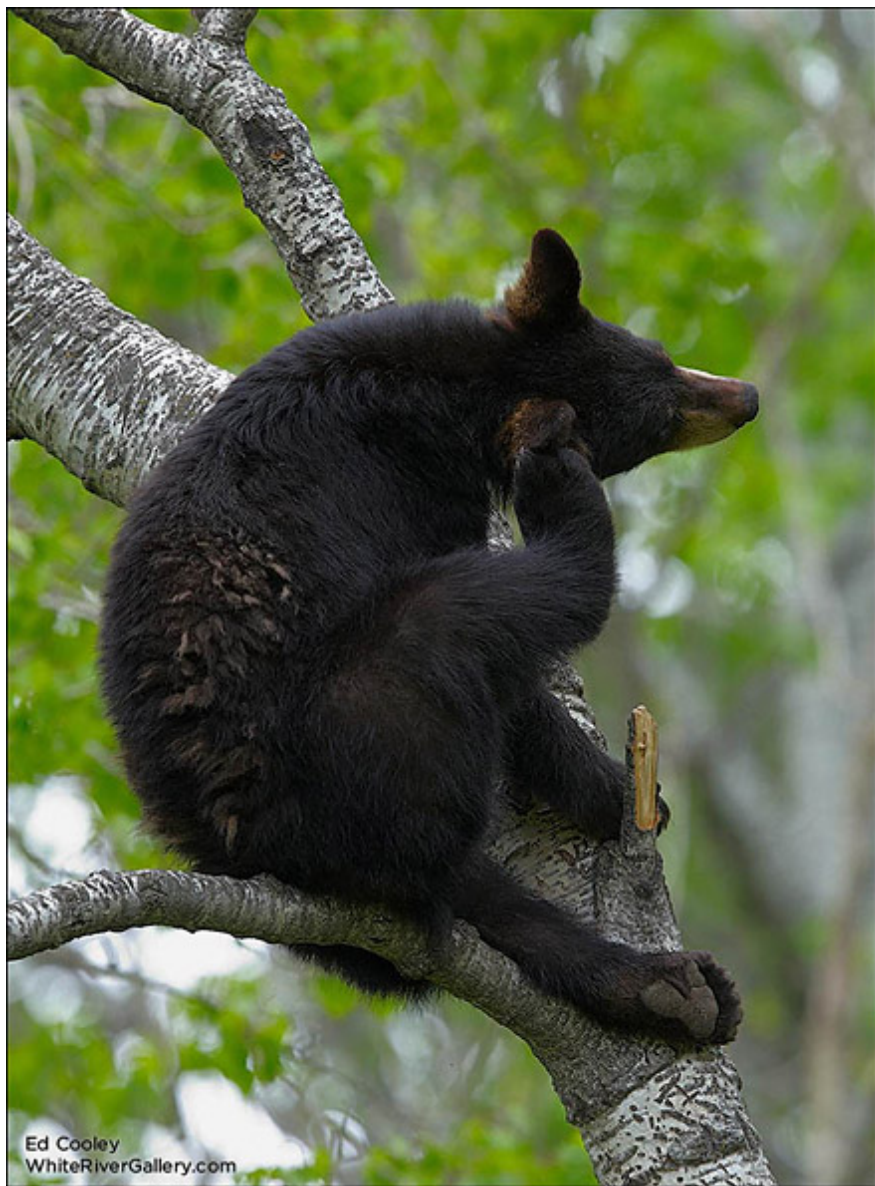


Yearlings are much like adolescent teens, caught between childhood and maturity. They just have a tough time fitting in.



All of this makes for some very interesting behavior. Imagine a 150 pound bear climbing to the top of an aspen tree with it swaying back and forth from the weight. It is a hoot watching them get into a comfortable sleeping position at the top of that tree.





Caught in this limbo the yearling does his best to survive and gain weight for the coming winter hibernation. The ones that survive emerge from their hibernation as mature black bears.

Such is life inside the “Magic Circle” of the [Vince Shute Wildlife Sanctuary](#), a private preserve with an incredible story where wild bears co-exist with humans without fear and confrontation.

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**Edward Cooley** is a fine-art nature photographer from Rogers, Arkansas. To see more of Ed's wonderful photography, visit his website, [White River Gallery](#).

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