The Grizzly Almanac: A Fully Illustrated Natural and Cultural History of America's Great Bear

Robert H. Busch

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Grizzly! For many people, even the mention of this bear's name strikes fear into the heart and a furtive glance over the shoulder, expecting a ravenous giant to come crashing through the bushes. Even its species name, *Ursus arctos horribilis*, sounds frightening. For others, this awe-inspiring carnivore represents the true nature of wilderness and is a creature to be respected, admired, and carefully coexisted with. In either case, *The Grizzly Almanac* is a carefully researched, expertly writ-

ten volume that will serve to educate and inform about the largest terrestrial carnivore in North America. And, as we all know, a little knowledge goes a long way to dissipate fear.

Busch is an admitted admirer of the grizzly bear, and his book is written from a point of view sympathetic to their plight; loss of habitat, over-hunting, and misunderstanding have led to a precipitous decline in numbers. However, his bias toward the great bear does not become readily apparent until the final chapter of the book, which informs the reader of conservation measures and current plans to keep this fascinating species from becoming extinct. The earlier parts of the book are an objective look at the bear and provide sort of an "all-you-want-to-know" approach to this creature. He carefully and clearly describes what is known about the evolution and biology of the bear and details its reproduction and dietary habits (right down to the average size of the teeth and claws!). He describes the research and efforts that have gone into understanding hibernation and the hyperphagia (eating almost everything in sight—but don't worry, it's mostly interested in berries and carrion) that precedes it.

From the straightforward biology of the bear he goes on to describe their intelligence and what is known about the bears' social interactions with each other, with other predators, and finally with man. He details the mythology of the grizzly in Native American culture, the initial sightings and interactions by European and later North American explorers and trappers, and even a few famous grizzlies and those who hunted them.

Finally, there is the requisite chapter on grizzly attacks, an emotionally charged but fascinating topic. Busch explains the best research on attacks and the causes of them (most often bears that have been habituated to feeding on human garbage). He gives research-based recommendations on how to avoid being attacked and what to do if you are. There is a balanced discussion on firearms and pepper spray. Several attacks are described in detail and analyzed. Anyone who wishes to share the wilderness with grizzlies would do well to heed the information in this chapter.

And then there are the pictures! Plentiful and expertly taken photographs of grizzlies and every aspect of their daily lives appear throughout this work. Although not advertised as a wildlife photography book, this volume will not disappoint those who wish to see close-ups and various poses of this beast in action. For that reason alone it is worth having this book on your coffee table. Randomly opening the book to almost any page yields a well-chosen photograph and a few accompanying paragraphs that even taken out of context from the rest of

the book will enhance your knowledge of the great bear. It's a great book to browse.

If you are a bear lover (as I am!) or travel in places where these magnificent creatures are still found, then you ought to have this book. Even if you hate and fear these creatures, if you're afraid they're going to eat you and your livestock, you ought to have this book—perhaps you'll change your mind.

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