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Review of *The Grizzlies of Mount McKinley* by Adolph Muire

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In 1922, 5 years after the establishment of McKinley (now Denali) National Park in central Alaska, Adolph Murie began an investigation of the natural history of the grizzly, or brown bear, Ursus arctos L., that was to extend over a period of 48 years. The most intensive fieldwork was conducted during 1959-70. This book is the report of his findings. At the time of his death in 1974, the book had not been finished, and we are indebted for its posthumous completion to the efforts of Jan O. Murie, with the collaboration of Louise G. Murie.

The quantity of information contained in the volume is remarkable, all the more so because Murie relied solely on the observation of free-ranging animals without use of capture-guns, marking of animals, radiotelemetry, and similar methods that seem to have become conditio sine qua non in most contemporary studies of large mammals. Although some of the data so obtained may not have been complete or precise, Murie's method did not conflict with the ethical principles governing national parks, and the interest of the book is much enhanced by its personal nature.

Following a preface by Jan O. Murie, the acknowledgments, and a short summary, the book consists of 11 chapters of which the 1st is a brief introduction by the author. Subsequent chapters are arranged logically to consider general characteristics of the brown bear, home ranges and movements, reproduction and relationships of females and young, subsistence, relationships with other animals (including man), and, finally, a brief discussion of policy toward the brown bear in national parks. Within each chapter, the material is arranged under appropriate subheadings, and detailed observations are reported in narrative style. The author did not intend to synthesize published information and only 28 references are cited. The frontispiece is a photograph of Murie in 1939. The 62 figures consist almost entirely of photographs.

The 2nd chapter, entitled Study Background, briefly considers taxonomy, physical characteristics of brown bears, habitat, numbers and density, determination of age of cubs, litter size, and locomotion, trails, and other signs left by the animals. Chapter 3 concerns range and movement, as determined by repeated observations of groups (females with cubs) or individuals identifiable on the basis of color and other physical peculiarities, including chronic disorders.
of home ranges were provided for 39 families (e.g., females with young) observed during 2 or more summers; the areas of home ranges as determined by Murie agree well with those defined by others by means of radiotelemetry. Comparable data for adult males could not be obtained because of their greater mobility. Females, with or without cubs, tended to occupy the same general areas in successive years. Home ranges in the Park overlapped to a considerable degree. Territoriality was not evident, but differences in social rank, based in part on size and sex, were well defined.

Breeding behavior, maternal care, and interactions between females and cubs and among siblings are considered in Chapter 4. Breeding extended from mid-May to about 10 July with maximal activity during the last week of May and June. The minimal breeding interval for females was 3 years, but the usual was 4. Cubs typically remained with females until they were ~2.5 years old, and continued to nurse into the summer of their 3rd year. The 5th month, as are findings from 810 scats collected during 1947–70. In connection with diet, Murie remarked (p. 9) that “It is thought that coastal bears attain their large size because of the abundance of protein foods, mostly fish.” There is evidence, however, that size in brown bears is genetically determined. The last section (12pp.) of Chapter 5 concerns carrion and its caching by the bears.

Chapters 6 through 10 describe interactions of bears with other species, with emphasis on ungulates. The relationship between bears and man is discussed briefly and objectively, without anthropocentric bias, which I appreciated, because people who wish to have the benefits of experience in the wilderness should be willing to accept the relatively slight risk involved. It is of interest that the failure of the berry crop in 1963 did not result in increased antagonism of black bears toward man, as it apparently did among black bears in north central Alaska during the same period.

As stated in the preface, Adolph Murie strove to avoid “... the ecologist’s jargon, the scientific phrases so frequently created by ecologists and animal behaviorists to make simple facts sound profound and impressive.” This attitude was perhaps carried too far in some respects (e.g., measurements given in inches, distances and areas measured in miles), but otherwise does not detract from the work. For the benefit of foreign readers and others not familiar with the subarctic flora and fauna, an appendix giving scientific names of plants and animals would have been desirable. The book is almost free of typographical errors. I noted that the diacritical mark was deleted from Eric Hultén’s name. I noted, as well, that “Microtus gregalis” was used for the “hay mouse” (p. 216), whereas comparisons of chromosomes have shown that the applicable name for this vole is M. minutus Osgood.

The last chapter, concerning the place of bears in national parks, is introduced by the following statement: “This section could be entitled Bear Management in National Parks, but I shy away from the word ‘management’ because it has been misused and the less we have of it in national parks, the better. Wildlife managers want to manage everything, just as a forester wants to practice forestry in parks, and engineers want to build more and wider roads.” This suffices to express Murie’s (and my own) view of the essential inviolability of such parks. One senses that he felt some apprehension about the future of our national parks, which, in concept, he considered (p. 241) to be “one of the bright spots in our culture.”

Adolph Murie’s book will be indispensable to those concerned with the natural history of bears, and the detailed information contained in the volume concerning mammals of other species will be useful to the many professional biologists or laymen interested in the fauna of subarctic North America. The book is a pleasure to read.—Robert L. Rausch, Division of Animal Medicine SB-42, School of Medicine, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195.