



Enrichment for Captive Bears



Boredom behaviours in bears tend to be a pain in the neck for zookeepers and conversationalists. Here are some research-supported methods to help reduce these behaviours!

What's Wrong?

Boredom behaviours:

- Arise due to lack of mental stimulation in captive settings and being able to carry out natural instinctual activities like: ^[1,2,3,4,5]
 - Hunting and searching for food ^[5,6]
 - Seeking mates ^[1,2]
 - Exploring ^[4,6]
- Can indicate inadequate welfare for the animal ^[2,4,7]

How is it Studied?

- Scientists either watch the animal in person or observe recorded footage ^[1,2,4]
- Record behaviour displayed at set intervals ^[2,7]
- Classify behaviours according to a list of known behaviours for the species ^[4,7]
- Record how often boredom behaviours occur ^[4,7]

How to Fix it

Enrichment: Can include objects or changes to the environment ^[3,6,7]

- Give mental stimulation and encourage natural behaviour ^[2,3,4]
- Helps to fulfill natural instincts that are otherwise challenging to perform in captivity ^[2,3,4]
- Has been found to decrease the frequency of pacing and other boredom behaviours ^[1,3,7]
- Can come in a variety of forms



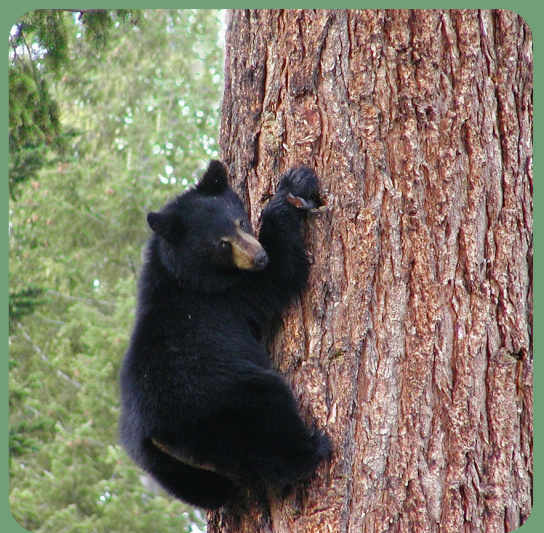
Bear trying to get kiwi form pipe. By Tombako the Jaguar on Flickr. Marked for creative commons use

Feeding Enrichment

- Encourages exploration behaviour ^[2,7]
- Provides mental stimulation while the bear works for the food ^[3,4,7]
- Examples include: ^[4,7]
 - Freezing food in ice blocks ^[4,7]
 - Hiding food in drilled holes in logs (usually plugged for an extra challenge) ^[2,6]
 - Trees that can be climbed to reach honey dispensers. ^[2,3]
 - Hiding food around the yard ^[1,3,7]

Other Enrichment

- Non-food-related enrichment
- Has been found to encourage:
 - Play behaviour ^[2,3]
 - Exploration ^[3,4]
 - Social behaviours ^[1,3,7]
- Can include:
 - scent trails made with objects used by other bears ^[1,3]
 - Climbing structures ^[2,3,4]
 - Inedible objects such as logs to play with. ^[3,4]



Bear climbing a tree. By ArtTower on Pixabay. Marked for creative commons use



Bear with enrichment toy. By 3analytics on Pixabay. Marked for creative commons and commercial use

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