

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION



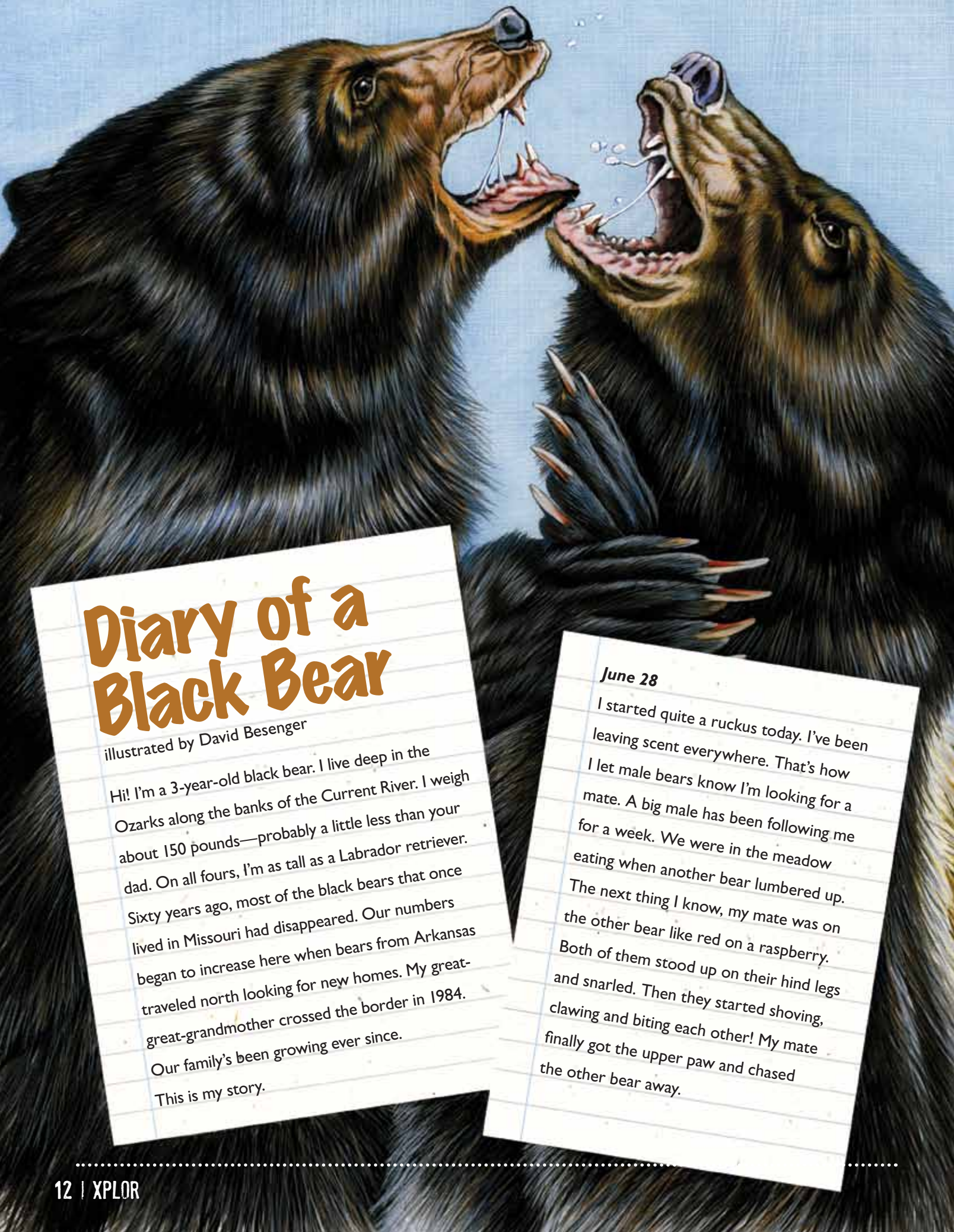
August/September 2010

Xplor

kids' adventures in nature

DIARY OF A BLACK BEAR

LEARN THE BARE TRUTH ABOUT
MISSOURI'S LARGEST MAMMALS

An illustration of two black bears roaring at each other. The bear on the left is shown in profile, roaring with its mouth wide open, showing its teeth and tongue. The bear on the right is also roaring, with its mouth open and its right paw raised towards the other bear's face. The background is a light blue sky with some water droplets or mist. The bears have thick, dark brown fur.

Diary of a Black Bear

illustrated by David Besenger

Hi! I'm a 3-year-old black bear. I live deep in the Ozarks along the banks of the Current River. I weigh about 150 pounds—probably a little less than your dad. On all fours, I'm as tall as a Labrador retriever. Sixty years ago, most of the black bears that once lived in Missouri had disappeared. Our numbers began to increase here when bears from Arkansas traveled north looking for new homes. My great-great-grandmother crossed the border in 1984. Our family's been growing ever since. This is my story.

June 28

I started quite a ruckus today. I've been leaving scent everywhere. That's how I let male bears know I'm looking for a mate. A big male has been following me for a week. We were in the meadow eating when another bear lumbered up. The next thing I know, my mate was on the other bear like red on a raspberry. Both of them stood up on their hind legs and snarled. Then they started shoving, clawing and biting each other! My mate finally got the upper paw and chased the other bear away.

A detailed illustration of a black bear's life cycle. In the top left, a black bear is shown eating green leaves. In the top right, a mother bear is in a den with two light-colored cubs. In the bottom center, a mother bear is in a den with two dark-colored cubs. The background is a mix of green foliage and brown autumn leaves.

September 19

Soon after the fight, my mate and I went our separate ways. Since then, I've been spending time on more important things—like eating. I stuff my tummy with whatever I find, mostly tons of acorns. Yum! Yesterday, somebody left dog chow on their porch. I was munching happily when a man stormed out of the house yelling. I dashed away, scared to death. How should I have known the food wasn't for me? If he didn't want me to eat it, he shouldn't have left it out there.

January 24

Last month, I crawled into my den under a blown-down tree. I've been sleeping there, all alone, ever since. I awoke today to find myself giving birth to two tiny cubs, a boy and a girl. They're cute, but awfully scrawny—no bigger than kittens. I use my legs to make furry, warm walls and tuck my head under my chest to breathe toasty air on them. On warm days, the cubs crawl up to sleep in the dense fur on my back. They drink my milk while I doze. When they nurse, they hum like happy, little motors.

April 5

We emerged from our den last week. I haven't eaten (or drunk or pooped) in 4 months, but it's hard to find food with two helpless cubs underfoot. Today, I raked leaves beneath a big oak and left the cubs there. I'm glad the tree is a good baby sitter. While I was away nibbling grass and tender leaves, a stray dog tried to attack the cubs. Luckily, they scooted up the tree quick as squirrels and started squealing. I watched from a safe distance until the dog got bored and left.

July 6

Today, I ripped open a rotten log and found a nest of carpenter ants. Jackpot! The cubs crowded in and began bawling. Even though I was starving—I usually am—I let them dig in. A big black ant pinched the male cub's tongue. He shook his head and yowled. Someday, he'll learn to eat the little white ants instead. For dessert, we feasted on blackberries. The cubs and I picked the whole bush clean with our nimble lips. I tried to catch a fawn, but it got away. I can run 30 mph, but I don't turn corners well.

August 1

The cubs play all day long! They love to dive on tree saplings and ride them to the ground. Sometimes when they flop off, the sapling whips back and smacks my nose. For them, my ears are chew toys. Yesterday, the cubs found a turtle and began batting the poor thing back and forth. I spotted a male bear lumbering toward us. He wanted to eat the cubs! I grunted to send them up a tree, but they didn't hear. They were too busy playing. I swatted one of them, and that got them climbing.

October 2

We've been spending our days fattening up for winter, eating every acorn in sight. Soon snow will fall, and food will disappear. I found a good spot for a den under a rocky ledge and started digging to make it big enough for the three of us. The cubs helped rake leaves inside for a bed. We'll sleep through the winter huddled together. In the spring, the cubs will be old enough to strike off on their own. By then, it will be time for me to start a new family.