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## FAMILY DISSOLUTION IN THE FLORIDA BLACK BEAR

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Female black bears (*Ursus americanus*) and their cubs usually remain together for 16 or 17 months (Rogers 1987, Clevenger and Pelton 1990, Schwartz and Franzmann 1992), and infrequently for up to 24 months (Jonkel and Cowan 1971, Miller 1994). Family breakup usually occurs when the adult female comes into estrous (Rogers 1977). Timing of family breakup (late May to early July) is well documented from northern latitudes (Rogers 1987, Clevenger and Pelton 1990, Schwartz and Franzmann 1992), but such information is lacking from populations in the southeastern United States. We report on the timing of family breakup of Florida black bears (*U. a. floridanus*) from three disjunct populations.

Study areas included the Apalachicola National Forest (ANF) in northwest Florida, Rock Springs Run State Reserve (RSRSR) in central Florida, and the Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve (FSSP) in southwest Florida. Bears were captured with Aldrich foot snares and culvert traps and then immobilized. Standard measurements were taken, a premolar tooth was removed for age-determination (Willey 1974), and an eartag, tattoo, and radio-collar were applied. Attempts were made to locate bears 1-3 times per week.

Dissolution of three Florida black bear families occurred from late May through early July. The individual accounts were as follows.

A seven-year-old female (F-18) and yearling male (M-19) were captured together in ANF on 14 May 1992. They were located 2.8 km apart from each other on 20 May 1992, and were not located again until 16 June when they were found together. They remained together through 24 June. Final separation occurred by 9 July 1992.

A five-year-old female (F-16) was captured and radio-collared on 7 December 1993 in RSRSR and her female yearling (F-40) was captured on 7 May 1995. Their initial separation occurred on 25 May 1995. Subsequently, F-16 was located with an adult male on 30 May 1995 and was frequently located with collared males throughout the summer. The yearling, F-40, had rejoined her mother by 5 June 1995, which was the last time they were located together.

Female F-03 and her three male cubs M-21, M-22, and M-23 were radio-collared in FSSP. All four bears traveled together through June 1992, but were not located together again after 30 June 1992. Beginning in July 1992, M-21 moved away from his mother, while M-22 and M-23 mirrored F-03's movements through August 1992 without being located with her.

The time interval of family dissolution in Florida (late May through early July) is similar to those reported from Pennsylvania (Alt 1978), Minnesota (Rogers 1977, 1987),

Tennessee (Clevenger and Pelton 1990), and Alaska (Schwartz and Franzmann 1992). Thus it appears that latitude may not affect this aspect of black bear behavior. Although our sample size is small, it appears that females in Florida briefly separated from yearlings during May, but allowed temporary reunions with their offspring before final dissolution.

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