

# GETTING TO KNOW WILDLIFE

## CARING FOR BEAR CUBS



By Donna DuBreuil,

President,  
Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife  
Centre – [www.wildlifeinfo.ca](http://www.wildlifeinfo.ca)

This story, from the days when we did wildlife rehabilitation, will hopefully serve as a reminder to not panic when bears enter developed areas. There is always a reason for it.

Like this one, after a dry summer leading to a shortage of natural food such as acorns and berries, that year overly zealous wildlife officials relocated dozens of adult bears, leaving behind many orphaned cubs. Female bears are cautious and protective of their cubs, sending them scrambling for the nearest tree when there is any threat. And, of course, that is where the cubs stayed as their mothers were trapped and carted away.

The first cub to arrive at the Centre weighed just 23 pounds. He was found on a nearby golf course, living on cat food put out by concerned staff. The second, an unrelated cub, came in just a few

days later, having been rescued from a tree at an apple orchard. He was a bit larger at 35 pounds but neither would have survived winter given that their metabolism requires a weight of at least 50 pounds to trigger a hibernation dormancy response.

The cubs couldn't have been more different in personality. The smaller, whom we named Pokey, was very assertive and wary, quickly becoming the dominant cub, while the other little fellow reminded us of Marty Feldman, the British comedian with prominent eyes and a goofy laid-back personality.

Already mid-November, volunteers worked frantically to reinforce an outdoor cage and build an insulated 'den' big enough to shelter the two cubs. However, Pokey claimed the den and let out fierce growls wherever 'Marty' tried to enter.

Each day, Marty delicately moved his backside a few inches further into the den, a silly expression on his face that said "maybe he won't

notice". Pokey continued to growl his displeasure. Finally though, after a bitterly cold night, we were relieved to find that Marty had finally been accepted as a roommate, the two snoring peacefully inside the warm den.

They ate voraciously – large bowls filled with dog kibble, meat, fruits and nuts – until they had put on sufficient weight to go into dormancy in late January. They didn't reappear until mid-March and again were ravenous. Although bears are often depicted as large threatening carnivores, their food preferences were decidedly vegetarian – romaine lettuce being a favourite, followed by fruits and nuts.

By mid-June they had tripled in weight and were ready for their independence. It was a special day as they were transported deep into the wilderness in what we all hoped would be a safe new home for them.

So, if you see a bear, don't panic – visit <http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/en/business/bearwise> for advice.