



FILE 6

The repentant carnivore

Bears are frequently described as a repentant carnivore, with a diet based on mass consumption of leafy plant material and fruits, supplemented with animal material, varying from ants up to the carrion of large herbivores. Their dentition and digestive tract conserve basic characteristics of the carnivores, but with adaptations for a varied and opportunistic diet.

Cambios estacionales en la dieta:

In spring fresh grass shoots are eaten, grazed in clearings amongst the broom scrub, in sunny pastures and in narrow gullies among rock outcrops. This later changes to larger leaved umbellifers, closely linked to stream lines and wet meadows. Additionally, they actively search for protein, especially carrion of wild ungulates.

In summer they continue to feed on umbellifers, also turning to cherries, often in the close vicinity to villages. In August, fleshy, high energy wild fruits ripen, including those of Alpine buckthorn, turpentine tree and bilberry, though many others are also readily eaten including blackberry, alder buckthorn and wild raspberry. They also raid beehives and ant nests, occasional predate on domestic livestock and happily take the remains of dead ungulates.

Autumn is a critical period, since the breeding success depends on the availability and quality of the previous autumn's diet. Dry fruits are the most important factor, principally oak acorns and beech mast, though they also search for hazelnuts and sweet chestnuts amongst a wide range of other fleshy fruits, such as apples, common whitebeam, strawberry tree and turpentine tree.

Not just vegetarian:

Although the brown bear diet is predominantly vegetarian, they can also hunt and consume vertebrates. A few cases of Cantabrian bears preying on wild ungulate calves in spring have been documented. The low frequency of predation has been confirmed in numerous studies of the diet undertaken in the Cantabrian Mountains, in which wild ungulates form only a very minor part, and in many cases may relate to the consumption of carrion. Bears coexist with livestock in the mountains, and attacks by bears are very scarce. In the Cantabrian Mountains, goats, more uncommonly calves, and even more rarely cows are killed, while in the Pyrenees, almost all attacks are on sheep. Damage to other human interests in the Cantabrian region is principally on beehives, followed in some areas by damage to fruit trees, especially cherries.