Hunting Dynamics, Condition Estimates and Movements of Black Bears Hunted with Hounds in Virginia

by

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
in
Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences

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December 15, 1997
Blacksburg, VA

Keywords: Black bears, home range, houndsmen, hunter success, hunter effort, physical condition, surveys, Virginia

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(Abstract)

Effort and success of Virginia’s bear houndsmen were determined through field and mail surveys, and hunter diaries. The number of houndsmen per chase ranged from 5 to 12, hounds ranged from 6 to 11, and each chase lasted 2 to 6 hours. Second chases of the day lasted 2 to 3 hours and 3 to 10 hounds were used. Fifty-three to 74% of all first attempts resulted in a chase and 24% to 44% of these bears treed. A 2nd chase occurred in 11% to 96% of attempts and 9% to 50% of bears treed. Five to 17% of the 1st bears and 13% to 21% of 2nd bears were harvested. Field surveys found virtually no differences in hunting effort or success between seasons, study areas, and years. The hunter diary appears to be the most reliable means of sampling hunter effort and success.

The applicability of Schroeder’s physical condition estimate (PCR) was tested on data from Maine’s black bear population. Bears exposed to poor hard mast had lower PCR’s than bears exposed to good hard mast (P = 0.009). PCR and body weights of adult female black bears in Virginia exposed to hunting did not differ from those not hunted (P = 0.09). Annual adult female, adult male, and cub survival and reproductive rates in the hunted population were numerically similar to those in the non hunted populations.

Five radio collared females were experimentally chased by hounds. The chases, on average, lasted 0.9 hours and 43% of bears treed. The average total home range for 3 of the bears was 17.8 km². The area used by 2 of the 3 bears pursued by hounds did not differ from their total home range (P ≥ 0.05) based on the MRPP test. The area covered by 3 of the 5 pursued bears was 5.6%, 11.8%, and 79.7% of their home range.
Acknowledgments

Funding for this project was provided by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries through their Federal Aid and Restoration Project WE99R. Other funding was provided by the National Biological Service, Virginia Polytechnic and State University, the United States Forest Service, the Virginia Bear Hunters Association, the Virginia Houndsmen and Sporting Dogs Association, Georgia Pacific, Union Camp Corporation, Westvaco, Northern Shenandoah Valley Audubon Society, Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club, Virginia Wilderness Committee, and Wildlife Forever.

I would like to especially thank Dr. Michael Vaughan, for giving me the opportunity and experience of working with Virginia’s bears and Virginia’s houndsmen. Thank you Mike for always being accessible and always lending an ear. Thank you to my graduate committee, Dr. Steve McMullin, Dr. Roy Kirkpatrick; thank you all for your support and guidance.

Thank you’s are not enough for Adam Vashon, Rachel Gray, Kim Needham, and Jenny Goldman, who as technicians collected hours of data for me in the Northern study area. You worked as many hours and gave as much of yourselves as the graduate students on this project; I greatly appreciate your dedication. Thanks especially to Rachel Gray for her many added hours helping me coordinate and run the first trapping season in the Southern study area. Thanks to my fellow bear study graduate students, Chris Ryan, Cale Godfrey, Jennifer Higgins, and Kim Needham. Especially, to Jen and Cale for all your initial work in setting up protocols, data sheets, and basically for coordinating and establishing the CABS project long before Chris, Kim and I arrived on the scene.

Thank you to the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries personnel, Betsy Stinson, Larry Crane, Marv Gautier, Joe Watson, Roger Hauck, and Dave Steffen. Thanks for catching bears, giving support, and the long hours of den work. Thank you especially to Marv and Joe for collecting data for me from the bear hunters in the 1995 kill season, for your friendship, and for never saying you couldn’t work. Thank you to Tim Huffman and Jesse Overcash of the United States Forest Service, for dropping things at a moments notice to help with den work or trapping, and thank you Jesse for always being there to answer questions and give support.

I’d like to give special thanks to Jill Croft, Katherine Fabrycky, Carol Linkous, and Renee Speenburgh. Thank you most of all for making 100 Cheatham, a cheerful and friendly place and for always being there for all the grad students. Without you, we’d all be very confused and undoubtedly lost in the paper work.

Thank you to the graduate students at Virginia Tech for the support in classes and our projects, for the lunch room humor, and for reminding me that there is more to life than graduate projects. Thank you to the graduate students I was able to coerce into getting up early to collect data during the bear kill season, Theresa Martinez, Mike Cyterski, Jenn Allen, Sybille Klenzendorf, and Doug Harpole. Special thanks to Elizabeth Sherfy for trapping bears and for helping me develop a good working relationship with the
houndsmen, by accompanying me on our first hunts. Thanks especially to the good friends I made in Virginia; Theresa, Dan, Ben, Mark and Elizabeth Sherfy, Jenn and Patrick, Vic, Joey, Dave, Becky, Christine, and Mark Penhollow. I had a lot of great times with you and I hope we don’t lose touch.

I can’t say enough about the undergraduate volunteers I had, thank you for the long hours, no pay, early mornings, and for the long hikes in the woods with the bear hunters. Without you my data would be insignificant, thanks especially to Joey Scalf, Dave Telesco, Becky Mikkelsen, Christine Proctor, Jessica McLaughlin, Geoff Rowe, John Altman, and Paul Thrift. Your enthusiasm and work was outstanding.

To my family and friends in Maine and those scattered across the U.S., I thank you for all your support, encouragement, and love. Thank you to Irene Glitzner, who came from Austria, to work with bears in Virginia. Thank you for sharing your enthusiasm, friendship, and love for the wildlife profession. Thanks to my family; Jen, Adam, Mom, Dad, and my grandparents. Thank you Kim & Nate, Sam, Steve & Nikki, Irene, Didier, Eric, Kent, Craig and Randy, and Beth, thanks for being the best of friends. Thanks especially to my sister Jen, I admire your love and dedication to the wildlife profession, it wouldn’t be the same if we didn’t share in it.

Randy Cross, Craig McLaughlin, and Ken Elowe, thank you. I learned a tremendous amount from you guys and am still learning. I am especially grateful for your friendship and for showing me how truly terrific it is to work with bears. Thank you Craig for lending me data for my 2nd Chapter, and for always being there to answer questions.

Thank you to the houndsmen that only knew me by the letters I sent requesting their help in the bear hunter surveys and diaries. Thank you for your time and willingness to contribute data about your hunts so that we can better document bear hunting (nothing contributed to this project by houndsmen was mandatory). Thank you for your good faith and volunteering to help us collect data on hunting bears with hounds.

I want to thank all the houndsmen that I accompanied on their hunts. Since I had never been bear hunting with dogs before, I left it in their hands to show me all there was to know about their sport. I was greatly impressed by the respect and trust they gave me as a new and self-invited guest on their hunting expeditions. Most of all, I want to thank them for the hunting experience they gave me. I enjoyed every day I spent in the woods with them, the friendships I gained, and the bears I got to see. Thank you for showing me again that bears are often times underestimated. I hope in turn I can give you and the bears an accurate depiction of hunting bears with hounds so that others might understand it and so that bear hunting can be better managed to preserve bears for the future.
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