

Bear cub recovering at wildlife center

Juvenile black bear found near starvation in Franklin

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FRANKLIN — An orphaned Louisiana black bear cub that was on the verge of starvation is recovering this week at a wildlife rehabilitation center in Tennessee.

The bear, a threatened species, was found chewing on sugarcane stubble in a harvested field south of Franklin after a deer hunter reported it to wildlife officials earlier this month.

“He was pretty much near starvation,” said state Department of Wildlife and Fisheries biologist Maria Davidson.

She said the cub, estimated to be 10 to 11 months old, weighed about 15 pounds, far below the 30-to-50-pound range of a normal cub that age.

Wildlife workers rescued the bear on Nov. 14 and brought it to Baton Rouge for emergency care.

“He turned right around. His appetite was good,” Davidson said.

The bear was transported last week to Appalachian Bear Rescue, a nonprofit group that rehabilitates orphaned and injured black bears at a Tennessee reserve on the edge of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Appalachian Bear Rescue President Jack Burgin said Tuesday that the young bear has been kept in a large kennel and fed yogurt and blueberries.

“It’s lacking its baby teeth and is severely underweight,” he said. “… It’s by no means out of the woods, but it is doing well.”

Burgin said the cub will soon be placed in one of the recovery center’s two half-acre fenced wooded areas.

He said the bears have limited contact with humans, and food, such as apples and yams, is tossed into

the fenced area from outside so the bears must forage to find it.

“We give the bear an all-natural, hands-off setting,” Burgin said.

The method aims to keep the bears wild so they will not become a nuisance.

The bear rehabilitation center, which started in 1996, is now caring for 10 cubs, including the recent addition from Louisiana.

Davidson said she hopes the bear could be returned to Louisiana by spring or summer of next year.

“It will depend entirely on him and how much weight he has gained,” she said.

Davidson said she suspects the cub’s mother is dead.

“Bears are extremely maternal. They don’t abandon easily,” she said.

Davidson said the cub will most likely be relocated in central or northern Louisiana, where the black bear population is not as strong as in St. Mary and Iberia parishes.

The Louisiana black bear was listed as a threatened species in 1992.

The bears reside mainly in the Tensas and Atchafalaya River basins.

There has been no recent study of how many bears live in the state, but the population is estimated to be from 600 to 700.

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