Bears in China

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The bear is a great predatory animal of the woodland. Formerly, the bears had more widespread distributions in forest lands of China and were more common during the fourth and the fifth decades of this century. But today the bears are rare, reduced both in number and range of distribution in our country, because of overhunting and destruction of their habitats.

Today there are three species and nine subspecies of bears in China.

I. Brown bear, *Ursus arctos* Linnaeus, 1785

There are three subspecies of the brown bear in China.

1. *Ursus arctos isabellinus* (Horsfield, 1826)

This bear is also known as the red bear; it is known to be distributed in Tianshan and Pamirs mountains of the western part of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region. In Central Asia, the red bears inhabit the forest lands at elevations of 700 to 4000 m. During 1958–1960, every year we received a few bear skins from Baicheng, Kurla, Chiamo and Rochiang districts. The bears of northern Xinjiang is possibly another subspecies, but their taxonomic status is still under investigation.

2. *Ursus arctos pruinosus* (Blyth, 1853)

This bear is called ‘‘Zangmashiug’’ (Tibet horse bear) or blue bear. It is an endemic race in China and possibly exist in small numbers in the south-western part of Mongolia (MPR). This bear occurs in alpine grassy steppes and cold deserts of Qinghai-Xizang plateau at elevations of 4500 to 5000 m. Usually they make a living by preying on Pikas. The boundary of their actual distribution area in China ranges from Qinghai, Kansu, southward to western Szechwan and Xizang (Tibet).

3. *Ursus arctos lasiotus* (Gray, 1867) (= *U. a. manchuricus* Heude, 1898)

This bear is widespread in forest lands of north-eastern China, including the Great Khingan, Wanda and Changbai mountains. On the Great Khingan and Lesser Khingan, they are common animals, with a greater population number than in eastern mounatin ranges. They destroy farm animals and sometimes they may injure man.

II. Black bear, *Selenarctos thibetanus* (G. Cuvier, 1823)

There are five subspecies of the black bear in China.

1. *Selenarctos thibetanus thibetanus* (G. Cuvier, 1823)

This bear is distributed in South-western Yunnan and south-eastern Xizang (Tibet).

2. *Selenarctos thibetanus laniger* Pocock, 1932

This occurs on the south slope of Mt. Qomolangma in southern Xizang (Tibet). It is a new subspecies of Chinese black bear found in 1979.
Map of distribution of bears in China.

*Ursus arctos* thibetanus
*Helarctos malayanus*
3. *Selenarctos thibetanus mupinensis* (Heude, 1901)

This is an endemic race of the black bear in China. It is widespread in an extensive region covering northern, central and south-eastern China, i.e., from the Huanghe (Yellow River) valley southwards throughout the Changjiang (Yangtze River) valley to the seacoasts. In recent years, its range has been expanded mainly in forest lands of each province.

4. *Selenarctos thibetanus formosanus* (Swinhoe, 1864)

This form is confined to the Islands of Hainan and Taiwan.

5. *Selenarctos thibetanus ussuriicus* (Heude, 1901)

This bear is widespread in forest lands of north-eastern China, but not in the Great Khingan mountains. In the eastern mountain ranges, their population numbers are more than the brown bears.

III. Malayan sun bear, *Helarctos malayanus* (Raffles, 1922)

*Helarctos malayanus wardi* (Lydekker, 1906)

This bear is restricted to the Yunnan Province and/or Szechwan (?). The Malayan sun bear of China has not been studied sufficiently so far and its range is still imperfectly known.

Some species or subspecies of the above bears should be given legal protection and scientific management in our country. These works are already in progress, though very slowly.

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