

## Awareness Quiz by Tamarack Song

Half of the continent is now covered in snow, which makes the old, familiar world, brand-new. I watch with amusement as fawns react to their first snow with a mixture of amazement and confusion; I'm happy for the Voles, who hurriedly disappear beneath the warm, secure blanket; and I pity the Owls who, after the snow crusts, can no longer plunge in to grab their furry prey. And yet no matter what I feel, I am entirely accepting of what the snow brings. It is neither good nor bad; it is merely the way of the Northcountry.

To those who are unfamiliar with snow, it might at first look like the white blanket wipes out a rich and varied landscape and leaves in its place a colorless, featureless barrens. It doesn't take long for the curious person to find out differently – a smorgasbord of tracks, along with a fascinating community of insects and tiny plants living atop the snow.

That person might also notice that the snow is anything but featureless. In fact, there are many ways to tell direction from the snow's character. The new quiz question (at the bottom of the page) will have you out reading that white field to see just how much it has to say. There is only one question this time because I have a feeling the list of answers is going to be long!

Now for the responses to last issue's questions:

### **1. Bears have long canine teeth; however, their bulky bodies aren't designed for chasing down something they can sink those canines into. What then does a Bear use those fangs for?**

Usually I save my comment for the end; however, my opening statement, that Bears' "bulky bodies aren't designed for chasing down something," brought a number of responses to the contrary, including one that was rather heated. A.J. Barnett sums them up with, "In spite of their appearance, bears are almost always surprisingly swift and agile." Thomas Wolfe adds, "I have personally seen footage of a mature male Grizzly chase down, kill, and consume, a mature whitetail doe." I have seen it myself with Black Bears, usually in the springtime when they are lean, and the Deer are either easy-to-catch fawns or old does.

In late summer and autumn, when Bears are putting on weight for winter, they are walking lard tubs who detest running, because they cannot move with grace or speed, and they overheat quickly. Those of you who have studied Bear scat, know that they subsist mainly on vegetable matter, with insects being their primary protein source. A Grizzly's diet is only about 15% meat on average, in some areas coming largely from winterkilled ungulates and spawning fish.

So why the fangs? Actually, relative to body size, a Bear's canines are rather small. "Big canines have two possible functions...biting and showing off," says Hazel Beeler. A Bear has little need for either, as his strength and ferocity are in his size and forepaws, and he typically ambles lazily along, browsing and grubbing, taking frequent naps, and only rarely running down his food. He does everything he can to conserve energy and not overheat. Bryce Gorrell notes that, even though Bears had wolflike ancestors, they no longer have reason for wolflike teeth.

### **2. Why do Grizzly Bears have straight claws, while those of Black Bears are hooked?**

"Curved claws are much better for climbing than straight ones, and Black Bears climb whereas Grizzlies don't," observes Hazel Beeler. "Black Bear cubs can spend up to four hours each day climbing or perching in trees," adds Thomas Wolfe, and Bryce Gorrell notes an important point – that Black Bears "need to climb." Because cubs are vulnerable, the sow has them rest up in trees. The sow will keep them within a couple hundred yards of a good climbing tree, which is at least 20 inches in diameter and with tight, furrowed bark (White Pine

and Hemlock are two of their favorites). Cubs trying to climb smooth or scaly-barked trees (such as Red Pine in my area) sometimes slip and fall to their deaths.

**T**<mailto:JAY.BEAUDOIN@domtar.com><mailto:tamarack@teachingdrum.org>**amarack's comment:**  
There were several who thought a Black Bear's curved claws would be good for digging. Actually, their claws are short and the curved shape makes them poor diggers. Soft Anthills are about all they can get into, and I have seen where they will use their teeth to tear into rotten logs for insects. Grizzlies are the diggers; George Phillips notes that their "straight claws are used for digging up ant hills and ...rodent burrows."

Thanks for the many good answers to these two challenging questions. Following is another thought-provoker; have fun with it, and I look forward to seeing your responses.

**New Question:**

**How does fallen snow tell direction? (Don't stop at one way – there are many.)**

Send your answers to "Quiz" at [tamarack@teachingdrum.org](mailto:tamarack@teachingdrum.org)<mailto:tdrums2@newnorth.net> or Teaching Drum Outdoor School, 7124 Military Road, Three Lakes, WI 54562.