

June 2000



Dear Everybody,

A bridal veil of mist drifts through the spruce and hemlock forest. Deep snowdrifts cling to the mountain, yet spring tip-toes through the alpine meadows, leaving tracks of brilliant green moss and the tender shoots. Within these patches of warm sunlight, freshly hatched insects fly mating rituals, like holding patterns, over the first flowers.

And into the meadow strolls a grizzly bear. Underweight and hungry from his long winter-sleep, his thick cinnamon fur hangs off his massive shoulders like a buffalo robe. But he is still huge. Still here.

This isn't just any grizzly bear or meadow. It is one of the Selkirk bears that you helped radio collar, and one of the meadows now conserved forever. The bear and meadow were being watched by Brian Johnson, the Education Officer you help support. Seldom are conservation successes so unqualified, so completely satisfying.

Hope, the collared female bear, has emerged from her den with her two yearling cubs frolicking behind. Wayne Wakened, one of the bear biologists, believes another female has new cubs this year because she is keeping to herself in remote areas. This is unconfirmed, however, since she has only been seen from an aircraft. Cubs, even grizzly cubs, are difficult to see from the air. To gather more data on bear biology, such as whether this female has new cubs, the Selkirk Project personnel have set up a video surveillance camera to tape the bears in remote areas. You bought the camera!

All this is great. But as always, the challenges are greater than the accomplishments. There are no funds available this year for collaring more bears. We need a number of surveillance cameras at \$3500 each, not just one! And we need to raise enough money to fund the use of a helicopter to count bears in berry patches in the fall. Thanks for anything you can do to help!

One of the questions asked most about working with bears is: "What do you do if one charges?" There are all kinds of glib answers to this question. But while visiting my Mother in the South recently, I was very surprised to find the best advice for avoiding bear attacks from a newspaper columnist, Dwain Walden, from Moultrie, Georgia! Apparently, Dwain had seen a documentary on TV about what to do when you come face to face with a grizzly.

If he comes upon a bear, Dwain admitted, "apart from certain involuntary body functions that might occur, I don't have a plan of action." The park ranger in the documentary advised that the worst thing you can do is run. To which Dwain responded, "Say what!?" And he added, "The narrator gave a couple of options, neither of which would be conducive to ever wearing those particular clothes again. One was to stand up and fight. I'm betting the only thing that will be accomplished is to establish what the [bear] will eat first." [Another option is to] "Look the bear square in the eyes and beat your chest and roar. But what do you yell at it? Take that you big fur ball! I'm guessing there's going to be something lost in the translation. Your arm. Your leg. Maybe more."

Knowing that you should not run from a bear, Dwain concluded that the safest thing to do when in bear-invested woods is to take someone with you who is slower than you are. This is similar to my personal course of action, which is to always go with someone braver than I. And that is easy since I am usually with Mark.

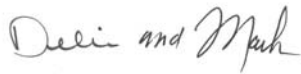
One day Mark and I were walking down a trail that wound its way through thick forest. We had already seen 2 black bears, and when I saw a third bear, I said, "Oh look, there's another bear." To which Mark said, "That's not just another bear, that's a grizzly. Let's stand quietly and watch him." I thought to myself, 'Say what!' I bent low and scurried through the trees as fast as I could go. To my credit I did NOT RUN. But it was a very, very fast scurry. Mark on the other hand stood right in the trail and watched the bear approach until he was 30 yards away. Then he ducked into the trees and watched the bear pass by. By this time I was long gone. Always put Mark between me and the elephant, the lion, the buffalo, or the bear: It's been a pretty good strategy. So far.

News from Africa!! Do you remember Hammer Simwinga and Albert Chilambwe? They were the Community Development and Agricultural Assistance officers for our North Luangwa Conservation Project in Zambia. We trained and assisted them for many years to help villagers establish cottage industries and improve their agriculture, so they would not have to poach elephants. Hammer and Albert have continued their work since our departure from Zambia, and since they have done such a good job, we are going to fund them once again. They need your help. For every local man or woman who gets a job, their family and an elephant family benefits.

As you may remember, in 1997, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Namibia were allowed to sell stockpiled ivory, thus weakening the international ivory ban. As a result, elephant poaching increased all over Africa. So, CITES of the UN voted once more that ivory cannot be sold from any country. Our study in Luangwa proved that the ivory ban saves elephants, so we were pleased with the new vote. Unfortunately, it was decided that elephant hides can be sold. Only time will tell what negative impact this action will have on elephants.

As always, you are with us during the bear trials and trails. Thank you for being our 'wing man!'

Cheers,



Delia and Mark

#### **PS Notes from Mary:**

1. Email: If you would like to be added to our email contact list for periodic updates on conservation initiatives, please email me at [marydykes@compuserve.com](mailto:marydykes@compuserve.com)
2. Change of Address: It saves on postage and administrative time if you can let us know if you have moved or are planning to move - or - have a new email address. Thanks!
3. Our Web Page: You should take a look at our Web Page! "www.owens-foundation.org was originally designed by volunteer Tom Steeb and is now maintained by our new Web Master, Bobby Dykes. Enjoy!

Thanks!!! Many thanks to the good folks at the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle Washington for their grants to help fund equipment for the Selkirk field biologists. Together we are making a difference.