

# THE BLACK BEAR ISSUE

## Welcome

In the Wisconsin Center for Wildlife, we think of February as “Bear Month!” Researchers at the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point have been studying natural history of black bears since 1974, and they typically visit bear dens in February. The study has changed over the years, but recently the research has focused on the numbers of cubs born to females each year and how these cubs survive. In this issue of the WCW Newsletter, we introduce you to the faculty and students studying bears and acknowledge the new Stephens Family Foundation Wisconsin Black Bear Research Endowment.



Cady Sartini (right) and graduate student Mairin Murphy with a sedated black bear during a den visit in 2024

## A Historic Endowment

Exciting news! The College of Natural Resources (CNR) has received a generous \$1 million endowment in September 2023 to further advance the Black Bear project. For more information, you can check out the details below or learn more in the [Boone and Crockett Club's publication, "Fair Chase."](#) Three funds were secured for the Endowment:

- The *Stephens Family Foundation Wisconsin Black Bear Research Endowment* supports general operations.
- The *Searle-Dew-Thomas Boone and Crockett Wisconsin Black Bear Fellowship Endowment* supports undergraduate and graduate student opportunities and J. Bergstrand is the first Fellow (pg 4).
- The *Safari Club International Wisconsin Black Bear Research Fellowship Endowment* supports research and education initiatives and C. Giesen is the first Fellow (pg 4).

# Black Bear Graduate Research

## *throughout the years...*

Click through the links below to check out all of the excellent Black Bear focused research conducted by UW-Stevens Point students from 1976 to today!

### [Impact of Hard Mast Production on Black Bear Harvest Methods](#)

*Nathan Kluge, 2022*

### [Black Bear Attack Associations and Agency Risk Management](#)

*Janel Scharhag, 2019*

### [Assessing Attitudes Towards Bears and their Management at the Local and Global Scales](#)

*Haley Netherton, 2019*

### [Life History Attributes of Black Bears \(\*Ursus americanus\*\) in Northern Wisconsin](#)

*Kathleen Schindler, 2008*

### [Black Bears and Elk of Northern Wisconsin: a Multi-Scale Analysis of Habitat Use and Seasonal Habitat Selection](#)

*Melanie Hansen, 2005*

### [Black Bear Density Dependent Population Regulation, Growth, and Den Site Selection in Northern Wisconsin](#)

*Peter Gesch, 2003*

### [A Demographic Comparison of a Hunted and an Unhunted Population of Black Bears in Northern Wisconsin](#)

*Kieran Fleming, 1997*



*Cece Giesen assisting with processing and collaring a bear at Treehaven.*



*Alumna Amber Smith as an undergrad with a yearling bear.*



*Students assisting with data collection at a bear den in 2024.*

### [Black Bear Population Dynamics, Home Range, and Habitat Use on an Island in Lake Superior](#)

*David Trauba, 1996*

### [Spring and Summer Habitat Use and Food Habits of Black Bears in Northern Wisconsin](#)

*Scott Storlid, 1995*

### [Black Bear Reproductive Biology, Denning Biology, Habitat Use, and Movements in Northern Wisconsin](#)

*Gregory Kessler, 1994*

### [Availability and Use of Foods by Black Bears in Wisconsin](#)

*Gordon Bertagnoli, 1986*

### [Black Bear Homing Tendencies, Response to Being Chased by Hunting Dogs, Reproductive Biology, Denning Behavior, Home Range, Diel Movements, and Habitat Use in Northern Wisconsin](#)

*Jack Massopust, 1984*

### [Food Habitats, Growth, and Cover Types Used by Northern Wisconsin Black Bears](#)

*Ned Norton, 1981*

### [Ecto- and Endoparasites of the Black Bear in Northern Wisconsin](#)

*Albert Manville, 1976*

# Faculty Corner

## Cady Sartini, Ph.D.

### Associate Professor and Principal Investigator for the Wisconsin Black Bear Project

**Why did the bear research project interest you?** When Tim Ginnett retired, the Dean of the CNR at the time, Christine Thomas, asked me if I would continue the research. I thought we could answer some important questions with a vast dataset, but the biggest thing I had ever worked on was a coyote. The project would provide new challenges and exciting opportunities. As a behavioral ecologist, bears are excellent models for studying behavior and human/wildlife conflict and I am passionate about both topics.

**Were you always interested in wildlife?** I grew up in the woods in Asheville, North Carolina but did not know that wildlife biology could actually be a career. I only knew a couple of hunters, and one made his own bows and arrows, so my knowledge of wildlife management was limited. My undergraduate majors were Environmental Science and Biology at UNC-Asheville and they focused on “what to do about problems” and “why problems occur” in the environment. In my senior year, I discovered wildlife biology - the perfect intersection of biology (why) and management (how) and then continued my education at Clemson University where I studied behavior of coyotes and raccoons for my Ph.D. That is when I became intrigued by scientific inquiry in general.

**Why are bears important for UW-Stevens Point?** Bears are not only important economically and biologically, but they also provide a model species for our students to learn how to conduct field work. Students build field skills and interpersonal skills by working with landowners on a complex project that requires equipment to be maintained, permits to be secured, animal welfare must be considered, etc. Bears choose where to den, so our field sites are chosen for us, providing unique logistic challenges as well. Students need to figure out how to collect data and monitor bear condition under these circumstances.

**What has surprised you over the last 4 years?** I have been incredibly lucky to work with many different species of wildlife in my career so I thought the bear project would be like the others, but it is truly different. I did not expect the more emotional connection I feel when at a bear den. I am

not sure if it is because we are in a den or because we hold small cubs, but I did not anticipate how much satisfaction I would personally get from the project.

**What is your favorite part of the project?** If you look on the back of my office door, you will see pictures that I have taken of students at bear dens. Those pictures are there to remind me of how rewarding this work is despite all the long hours required to coordinate and manage the project. It is the most satisfying part of my entire job.



*Cady Sartini with an adult bear in its den in February 2024.*

## A Note from an Alum

**Amber Smith - alumna May 2023** is excited that Fiona, a rehabilitated and released bear from last year, has 2 cubs in 2024! She keeps track of the project since graduating. “Cady taught me to be mindful of people’s perceptions of the work we do,” she says. Her favorite memory is when she was able to see the excitement in the faces of 2 preschool aged children while at a den. “That was the best part of the den visit for me!”

# Graduate Student Corner

## Jacob Bergstrand

**Why did you decide to come to UW-Stevens Point for graduate school?** I grew up in Coal Valley, Illinois, a small rural agricultural community. We lived on about 10 acres of forest, which created the foundation of my interest in nature. I chose to go to graduate school at UW-Stevens Point because I received a B.S. in Wildlife Ecology and Management from UW-Stevens Point in 2021 and I really enjoyed living in Stevens Point, and in Wisconsin in general.

**Briefly explain your graduate research:** I am studying how Wisconsin agricultural producers perceive wildlife damage and abatement programs. Wildlife can cause a direct threat to an agricultural producer's livelihood. A black bear destroying a corn field or beehive can result in significant monetary loss for a producer as well as create stress. These human-wildlife conflicts can influence perceptions of tolerance and wildlife damage management strategies. Therefore, it is important to understand what makes producers more or less likely to use abatement programs. Producers get the opportunity to provide suggested improvements so agricultural organizations can use this research as an opportunity to assist with policy development or change.

**What have you found so far?** Local culture and hunting requirements drive program factors and both influence the decision for agricultural producers to enroll in an abatement program. Effective abatement would allow producers to protect their crops by themselves while using recreational hunting to reduce wildlife population densities. Most producers voiced frustrations with irresponsible landowners, hunters, and the inability to protect their livelihood from damage but had little frustration toward wildlife. Many enjoy and tolerate wildlife in general, but once damage occurs, tolerance levels drop. Producers who have used the program praised the technicians that assist their counties, and remain thankful for timely payments and agency bear trapping.

**What do you want to do after graduation?** I hope to work as a human-wildlife conflict biologist, researching and managing bears. For now, I am fortunate to be going back to Yellowstone National Park to rejoin the bear management team after I graduate this May, marking my fourth season working for the National Park Service in bear management.



*Jacob Bergstrand attended the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation Annual Meeting in December, 2023.*

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# Undergraduate Corner

## Cece Giesen

**How did you get involved in black bear research?** I began working with the student chapter of The Wildlife Society on bear research in fall 2021 and later completed the Black Bear Ecology course. I also am the first Safari Club International Fellow. I decided to attend UW-Stevens Point because of these opportunities to conduct research.

**Briefly explain your undergraduate research:** We are using data from 1989 - 2024 to determine if bears have gotten bigger over time and to see if bears are reproducing at earlier ages over time.

**What have you found so far?** So far, yearling bears are experiencing a 0.35 kg per year increase in weight and the overall population is experiencing a 0.26 kg per year increase. But analyses are still ongoing.

**What do you want to do after graduation?** I graduate in May 2024, and will be moving to College Station, Texas to pursue a M.S. degree at Texas A & M. I am working with Perry Barboza, Ph.D. to study the effect of oil and gas development on physiology of female caribou.