

Bears not sleeping during warm winter

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Scientists, calling it another sign of climate change, say European brown bears have stopped hibernating in the mountains of northern Spain.

First bees, butterflies and swallows flitted about in Britain during the winter. Now scientists report that European brown bears have been spotted plodding through the forests of Spain's Cantabrian mountains instead of snoozing in caves, the Independent said.

Normally bears slumber throughout the winter because frozen weather makes food scarce.

But many of the 130 bears in Spain's northern regions remained active throughout recent winters, naturalists from Spain's Brown Bear Foundation in Cantabria said.

The warm weather has affected female bears with cubs. They're finding enough edible goodies on the mountainsides to make winter food-gathering forages "energetically worthwhile," scientists said.

"If the winter is mild, the female bears find it is energetically worthwhile to make the effort to stay awake and hunt for food," said Guillermo Palomero, the foundation's president and coordinator of a national plan for bear conservation.

The behavioral changes suggest that global warming could be responsible, said Juan Carlos Garcia Cordon, a geography professor at Cantabria University, and a climatology specialist.

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