

Availability of human food shortens and disrupts bears' hibernation

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With winter approaching, bears all over the world are getting ready to hibernate. New research suggests that not all bears will spend entire winter in their dens, however, especially where baiting and other kinds of bear feeding is performed for hunting purposes and diversion from human settlements. Credit: *Journal of Zoology*

With winter approaching, bears all over the world are getting ready to hibernate. New research suggests that not all bears will spend entire winter in their dens, however, especially where baiting and other kinds of bear feeding is performed for hunting purposes and diversion from human settlements.

When researchers studied the denning behaviour of [brown bears](#) in Slovenia, a country where intensive bear feeding with corn is practiced throughout the year, they found that the availability of human-provided food shortened the [hibernation period](#) by 45% in females and 56% in males. Bears also regularly abandoned their dens to visit bear feeding sites throughout the winter.

The results have important management and ecological implications, as reductions in denning

periods increase the potential for bears' interactions with other species, including people.

"Hibernation is an important part of the bear life cycle. Our research showed that providing bears with human food can disrupt this cycle and increases the period when [bears](#) interact with people," said Dr. Miha Krofel, lead author of the *Journal of Zoology* study. "These side-effects caution against uncritical application of bear feeding and baiting practices, which are regularly used throughout the world for various purposes in bear management."

More information: M. Krofel et al, Winter sleep with room service: denning behaviour of brown bears with access to anthropogenic food, *Journal of Zoology* (2016). [DOI: 10.1111/jzo.12421](https://doi.org/10.1111/jzo.12421)

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