

**SHARE THE SPIRIT:
AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE ENDANGERED
SPIRIT BEAR**

by
Sammy the Spirit Bear & Friends

Have you ever heard of the Spirit Bear? I first became aware of this rare, beautiful white bear a few days ago when Sammy, our fourth grade class mascot, came home with me. In my entries, I wrote a mini-story about Sammy discovering which bear species he belongs to.

There are eight species of bears around the world: (1) Asiatic Black Bears, (2) Black Bears, (3) Brown Bears, (4) Giant Pandas, (5) Polar Bears, (6) Sloth Bears, (7) Speckled Bears, and (8) Sun Bears. Each species has many bear sub-species. Over the last few days, Sammy and his friends did research on the Internet to figure out which of these eight species Sammy is part of. Adult size, range (the places in the world where Sammy and bears like him live), and habitat (the type of vegetation in the places where Sammy and bears like him live) would be very helpful clues in determining Sammy's bear species. However, I pretended as if Sammy was adopted by our class when he was a tiny cub and had not yet learned about where he came from. This means Sammy and his friends had to rely on Sammy's cub appearance to determine his species.

When people think of white bears, polar bears usually come to mind. However, polar bears are not the only white bears. In fact, the species name 'black bear' is not a very meaningful name since these bears can come in many colors such as black, brown, gray, silvery-blue, and creamy white. Interestingly, black-colored black bears may have brown cubs, brown-colored black bears may have black cubs, and black-colored black bears may have a white cub. It was clear from his appearance that Sammy was either a polar bear or a black bear with white fur.

Sammy and his friends focused their research on differences in the appearance of polar bear cubs and black bear cubs. Here are their most important findings:

- Although Sammy's fur is a similar color to polar bear's, the shapes

and sizes of his head, nose, and neck are more like a black bear's. Compared to the black bear, the polar bear has a long, narrow head and nose.

- A polar bear's head looks small compared to its body, and it has a very long neck. Sammy's head is not at all small for his body, and he barely has a neck.
- Polar bear ears usually lie flat, while Sammy's ears stick up. Black bear ears are positioned higher on the head than polar bear ears.
- The eyes of polar bears are a much darker shade of brown than those of black bears. Sammy's eyes look black because his pupils are so large, but if you look closely, you can see the chocolate brown rim around the pupil.
- Polar bear fur looks wooly and thick, while black bear fur is sleeker like Sammy's.
- Compared to black bears, polar bears have long, stocky legs. Polar bears have wide paws with webbed toes that help them paddle through the water.

Polar Bear Cub



Polar Bear Paw



Sammy





Sammy and his buddy Otis on the Spirit Bear Youth Coalition website
(11/17/07)

The more research Sammy and Otis did, the more they were convinced that Sammy is a very special type of bear. He is not a cousin of the polar bear, and he is not an albino. Sammy belongs to an endangered sub-species of black bears called the Kermode or Spirit Bear that lives in the rainforests of British Columbia. To learn more about the Spirit Bear and the fight to save it, visit the Spirit Bear Youth Coalition website (<http://www.spiritbearyouth.org/>). The information on the website was put together by Simon Jackson, the founder of SBYC.