

Bears beat birds in scattering seeds

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A black bear walks through dense bushes of blueberries in Juneau, Alaska. A study of bears and berries has determined that the big animals are the main dispersers of fruit seeds in southeast Alaska. Photo from: Taal Levi and Laurie Harrer via AP

Bears poop in the woods. That is not too surprising. They live in the woods, after all. Here is something surprising, though: the bear poop affects the ecosystem. An ecosystem is all the living and nonliving things in an area. Plants, animals and rocks are all part of the ecosystem.

So is bear poop. Scientists studied bears in Alaska. They found out that bears spread more fruit seeds than any other animal. They spread the seeds through their scat. Scat is another word for poop.

Scientists used to think birds spread the most seeds. The results of the study surprised them.

Bears are like farmers, explained Taal Levi. She is one of the scientists who studied the bears. When bears poop, they spread the seeds of the plants they eat. This helps to grow more of those plants.

Video Cameras Record Animals Eating Berries

In Alaska, brown bears eat salmon, a large fish. The bears wait for the fish to enter streams. While they wait, they snack on berries.

Levi and other scientists set up video cameras in the forest. They wanted to see which animals were eating the most berries. They saw that birds picked off a few berries at a time. But bears ate them by the hundreds!

Bears leave a lot of scat. The seeds of the fruit they eat end up in their scat. So when they poop, they spread fruit seeds by the thousands. This affects what grows in the forest, the scientists say. It means more fruit plants will grow.

Rodents also help to scatter seeds. They find the bear scat. Then they store it just under the dirt, Levi said. Sometimes rodents lose track of their hiding places, though. The seeds in the scat have the chance to grow into plants.

What Will Happen If A Plant Becomes Harder To Find?

Laura Gough is an ecologist. She studies how animals are connected to their environment. Gough has worked in Alaska for more than 20 years.

Think about a plant that many animals eat, Gough said. What will happen if that plant becomes harder for animals to find? The whole ecosystem could change.

Gough read the study about bear scat and seeds. She said it reminded her of the dodo bird. The dodo bird is extinct. That means it died out completely. It is no longer found on Earth. The dodo bird used to spread seeds of some plants.

Animals And Plants Help Each Other Survive

Those plants went extinct after the dodo bird did, Gough said. That is because animals and plants are connected. Animals need plants for food. Plants need animals to spread their seeds. They help each other survive.

Imagine that the bears in Alaska were gone. The seeds would simply fall to the ground. They would not be moved to different places. The plants would not be able to live and grow as well.



Quiz

1 How do bears spread the seeds of the plants they eat?

- (A) in their fur
- (B) in their poop
- (C) in their paws
- (D) in their teeth

2 Read the paragraph from the section "Video Cameras Record Animals Eating Berries."

Bears leave a lot of scat. The seeds of the fruit they eat end up in their scat. So when they poop, they spread fruit seeds by the thousands. This affects what grows in the forest, the scientists say. It means more fruit plants will grow.

Which question is answered in this paragraph?

- (A) Why did scientists make a video?
- (B) Where do bears poop in the forest?
- (C) How does bear poop help the forest?
- (D) What type of fruit do bears like to eat?

3 Which spreads more seeds, a bird or a bear?

- (A) A bird because it can move around faster.
- (B) A bird because it uses more energy moving.
- (C) A bear because it is larger and requires more food.
- (D) A bear because it hibernates through the winter.

4 Read the section "What Will Happen If A Plant Becomes Harder To Find?"

Select the sentence that explains what could happen if one plant or animal disappeared.

- (A) She studies how animals are connected to their environment.
- (B) Gough has worked in Alaska for more than 20 years.
- (C) The whole ecosystem could change.
- (D) Gough read the study about bear scat and seeds.

5 Which of the following describes how the bears and berry plants help each other to survive?

- (A) The berry plant provides the bears with food and the bears help disperse the plants' seeds.
- (B) The berry plant provides health to the bear and the bear helps bury the seeds.
- (C) The berry plant provides shelter for the bears and the bears help disperse the seeds.
- (D) The berry plant provides the bears with food and the bears help bury the seeds.

Gough read the study about bear scat and seeds. She said it reminded her of the dodo bird. The dodo bird is extinct. That means it died out completely. It is no longer found on Earth. The dodo bird used to spread seeds of some plants.

Fill in the blank. The "dodo" is a ____.

- (A) type of plant
- (B) type of animal
- (C) type of seed
- (D) type of bear

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Why did the extinction of the dodo bird cause the extinction of a plant?

- (A) The plants needed the dodo bird to help its seeds grow.
- (B) The plants needed the dodo bird to help spread its seeds.
- (C) The plants needed the dodo bird to help eat its seeds.
- (D) The plants needed the dodo bird to provide protection.

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Read the following paragraph from the section "Video Cameras Record Animals Eating Berries."

Rodents also help to scatter seeds. They find the bear scat. Then they store it just under the dirt, Levi said. Sometimes rodents lose track of their hiding places, though. The seeds in the scat have the chance to grow into plants.

Which word could replace "scatter" WITHOUT changing the meaning of the sentence?

- (A) move
- (B) eat
- (C) poop
- (D) grow