

Once-starved La. black bear back in woods after rehab

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SHAW — The young bear released Thursday in Concordia Parish has come a long way from the starved cub found in St. Mary Parish in November.

The cub weighed only 15 pounds and was trying to scrounge food from a sugarcane field's stubble.

Normal weight for a bear cub at 10 or 11 months old is between 30 and 50 pounds.

"It was so weak, when it bit you it didn't even hurt," said Paul Davidson, executive director of the nonprofit Black Bear Conservation Committee.

"This bear was as close to starvation that you're going to get," agreed Maria Davidson, large-carnivore program manager of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

Maria Davidson and Paul Davidson are married.

After months of rehabilitation at the Appalachian Bear Rescue center in Tennessee, the now 93-pound yearling bear was released at the Red River Wildlife Management Area near Shaw.

Now is the right time for the bear to be released because lots of food is available this time of year, and it's at the age where its mother would have kicked it out to be on its own anyway, Paul Davidson said.

On Thursday, members of Wildlife and Fisheries and the Black Bear Conservation Committee prepared to let the young bear out of the crate.

Some unloaded the crate from the truck while other staff loaded a shotgun with noise makers and rubber buckshot.

Another person held onto a black cur dog named Sophie who

is trained to deal with bears.

None of this hurt the bear, but the noise and commotion make it clear that being around humans is an unpleasant experience.

That's a good lesson to learn if this bear is going to stay wild and survive.

"We want it to not like people," said Dave Telesco, biologist with the Black Bear Conservation Committee.

"The idea is to extend the negative experience."

The young bear wasn't eager to leave the steel travel crate. It took some convincing, and a lot of banging on the crate, before the bear stuck its head out.

That's all it took.

A few seconds and a quick left turn and the small bear was into the woods and up a tree where it watched the activity below it.

Fattened bear cub back in wild

"He did exactly the thing instinct told him to do. Find the closest tree and climb it," said Maria Davidson.

"He looks good, very good."

Johnny Warren, supervisor for the Red River Wildlife Management Area, said he's happy with the bear reintroduction at the area.

"I just like to see black bears down here instead of driving to Colorado to see one," Warren said. "We should have black bear here."

The Louisiana black bear is listed as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act.

There are an estimated 600 Louisiana black bears in the state, Paul Davidson said.

Although the bear was found in a coastal parish, he was released in north-central Louisiana because there's a desire to introduce those genetics into the bear population farther north, Paul Davidson said.

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