



# Mexican Grizzly: Forgotten Sky Islands Carnivore

By Vince Pinto  
*Part One*

*This is the first in a two-part series about the Mexican grizzly bear.*

Grizzly. The mere mention of the name is likely to conjure such disparate images as "icon of the western wilderness" versus "bloodthirsty beast." Try to name a species that polarizes *Homo sapiens* more and you enter the realm of Sharks, Spotted Owls, Snail Darters, and the like. It seems to me that most people either love or hate *Ursus arctos*. Personally, I'm apt to embrace the entire spectrum of emotions that these powerful predators evoke. After all, how can anyone hold all the truth about this potent force of nature?

Back in the mid 1980s, I received my Wildlife Biology degree at the University of Montana, where I had ample opportunity to tread amongst these ursine gods. Unfortunately I never saw one, but just knowing they were there altered my perception of self and space. I might just see one of these impossibly powerful predators.....and it could

well maul or eat me. My senses were on full alert and because of this I felt more alive than ever. Each moment held fascination, each crunched leaf might indicate the lord of the forest lurking nearby.

Aldo Leopold, the eminent "father of wildlife biology," wrote about the last known grizzly killed in Arizona in his famous essay entitled "Escudilla." Leopold chronicled the slaughter of "Old Bigfoot," a lone behemoth who lived on the towering Escudilla Mountain. It seems that each year this venerable bear wandered down from the mountain to pulverize a cow - his spring feast.

The inevitable happened when a government trapper came in and killed this massive grizzly, displaying its hide on the side of a local barn. Leopold's haunting words still and forever echo in my mind: "Escudilla still hangs on the horizon, but when you see it you no longer think of bear. It's only a mountain now."

In 1833 a trapper reported killing a Mexican Grizzly that yielded ten gallons of oil. One

source reported these bears as being common near Nogales, Sonora in the 1800s. They also lived in the Peloncillo, Dragoon, Santa Rita, and Pajarito mountains, and although they were smaller than more northern populations, they could weigh up to 800 pounds.

The Mexican Grizzly was likely extirpated from the American Southwest by the 1930's or 40's. It lingered in three mountain ranges in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico, where as of 1960, perhaps 30 remained.

Despite efforts to protect them, the few that remained were hunted by ranchers and farmers. By 1964, the Mexican Grizzly was presumed extinct. An integral part of our region's ecology was cut from the fabric of the landscape and the implications are staggering.

*Vincent Pinto and his wife, Claudia, run RAVENS-WAY WILD JOURNEYS. They offer local tours dedicated to the preservation of the incredible biodiversity in the Sky Islands.*



## Cate's Corner



By Cate Drown

### Finding Feline Harmony

Hello again, my fellow animal lovers! I took a couple of months off, due to a broken wrist that came my way while carrying a 40 lb. bag of dog food up my porch steps. Appropriate, don't you think?

With more reading time on my hands, I came across some valuable tidbits of animal trivia, one of which has proven helpful in bringing about social harmony between my cats.

I have three cats in my household. My first cat,

female, was at one time my only cat, quite comfortable living with the dogs and me. When Bonaparte (Boney), a male grey tabby kitten, arrived a year later, Dulcie wanted nothing to do with him. But Boney became fast friends with my dear Bearded Collie, Ranger, so that wasn't an issue.

Shortly thereafter, Miss Matahari (Mattie) arrived, quite on her own, and made herself at home, much to Dulcie's chagrin. Then, some time later, Ranger left us for Spirit World. Boney

got bored and he and Mattie started bullying Dulcie.

This did not seem fair at all, since Dulcie was the first kitty-cat in residence. I tried several things to no avail and often thought of finding a new home for Mattie, but found that was hard for me to do since she had already been abandoned on our doorstep.

Still, I was not happy with the situation. Dulcie took to living up on the fridge, where I fed her separately, or atop the high cupboards where I had made soft beds for her. She is arboreal by nature anyway, but she no longer freely mingled throughout the household with me and I missed our snuggle time.

This went on for several years. Then, while recuperating from my wrist injury, I read an article by The Cat Whisperer, stating that in order for cats to exist harmoniously together, they need to have each others' scents on them, such as they get through grooming each other.

I thought, Hmm...how does that help? It's not like these cats and Dulcie will be licking each other any time soon. But then I thought

perhaps if I were to brush all three cats with the same brush, their scents would end up on each other that way.

I tried it and it has made a huge difference! They are not snuggling together, by any means, but all three cats are spending time in the same room together, and sleeping in bed with the dogs and me. Dulcie no longer scoots by the other cats, fearful of being chased, they no longer chase her, she does not hang out in the heights all the time except when she wants to and rarely do I hear a hiss escape a single cat's lips.

