

A Big Bear Wins a Winter Survival Contest

A public vote picked 89 Backpack, a brown bear whose autumn weight may help him survive hibernation.



A large brown bear stands in a river while salmon leap around it in an autumn forest.

A brown bear named 89 Backpack has won Fat Bear Week 2026, according to BBC Newsround. The yearly **contest** is run by Katmai National Park in Alaska. People vote for the bear they think has gained the most **weight** before **winter**.

Backpack got 103,344 votes. That was more than 5,000 votes ahead of Bear 910, who came in second. More than 2.5 million votes were cast this year. Last year, the contest had 1.7 million votes.

The contest sounds funny, but the bear fat is serious. Brown bears at Katmai eat a lot from June to mid October. They catch **salmon** with their jaws or paws in Brooks **River**. Salmon are fish that swim from the ocean into rivers to lay eggs.

The bears are getting ready for hibernation. Hibernation is a deep winter rest. During that time, bears do not eat or drink. They can lose one-third of their body weight while they stay in their dens.

That means a bigger body can help a bear survive. Adult male brown bears often add about one-fourth more body weight by **autumn**. The biggest males can weigh more than 540 kilograms. That is about as heavy as a grand piano.

Backpack is a male brown bear. He got his name when he was a cub. He liked to climb onto his mother Holly's back as she crossed Brooks River. Holly also won Fat Bear Week in 2019.

To be at Katmai in late summer would mean watching hungry bears work for food. A bear might stand in rushing water. It might wait for a salmon to leap close enough. Then it would snap or swipe. Each fish could help build the fat needed for winter.

The contest also shows how people can watch wild animals from a distance. The bears did not choose to join. Park workers use the contest to teach people about bear life and winter **survival**.

Some voters thought Bear 910 should have won. They believed she had worked hard and looked larger overall. That debate is part of the fun. It also reminds us that judging animals by photos is not the same as measuring them.

Fat Bear Week is silly on purpose. But behind the jokes is a real science lesson. In nature, being fat at the right time can be healthy. For these bears, autumn weight is winter safety.

Written from reporting by BBC Newsround.

THINK IT THROUGH

1. Should a wildlife contest like Fat Bear Week be more playful, more serious, or a mix of both? Defend your answer.

2. Voters judged bears from far away. What important things might people miss when they judge an animal only by pictures or video?

3. How could a town or school teach people about nearby wildlife without bothering the animals?

A Big Bear Wins a Winter Survival Contest

W I N T E R L I E E
S U R V I V A L O S
W A N E G L T G C T
T S L H I R I A O A
T N A M I W I L N T
E T U K O E E V T G
A U T U M N S E E W
T S R U G A W I S R
R L N W E I G H T S
N E A H W I A D I L

AUTUMN

CONTEST

RIVER

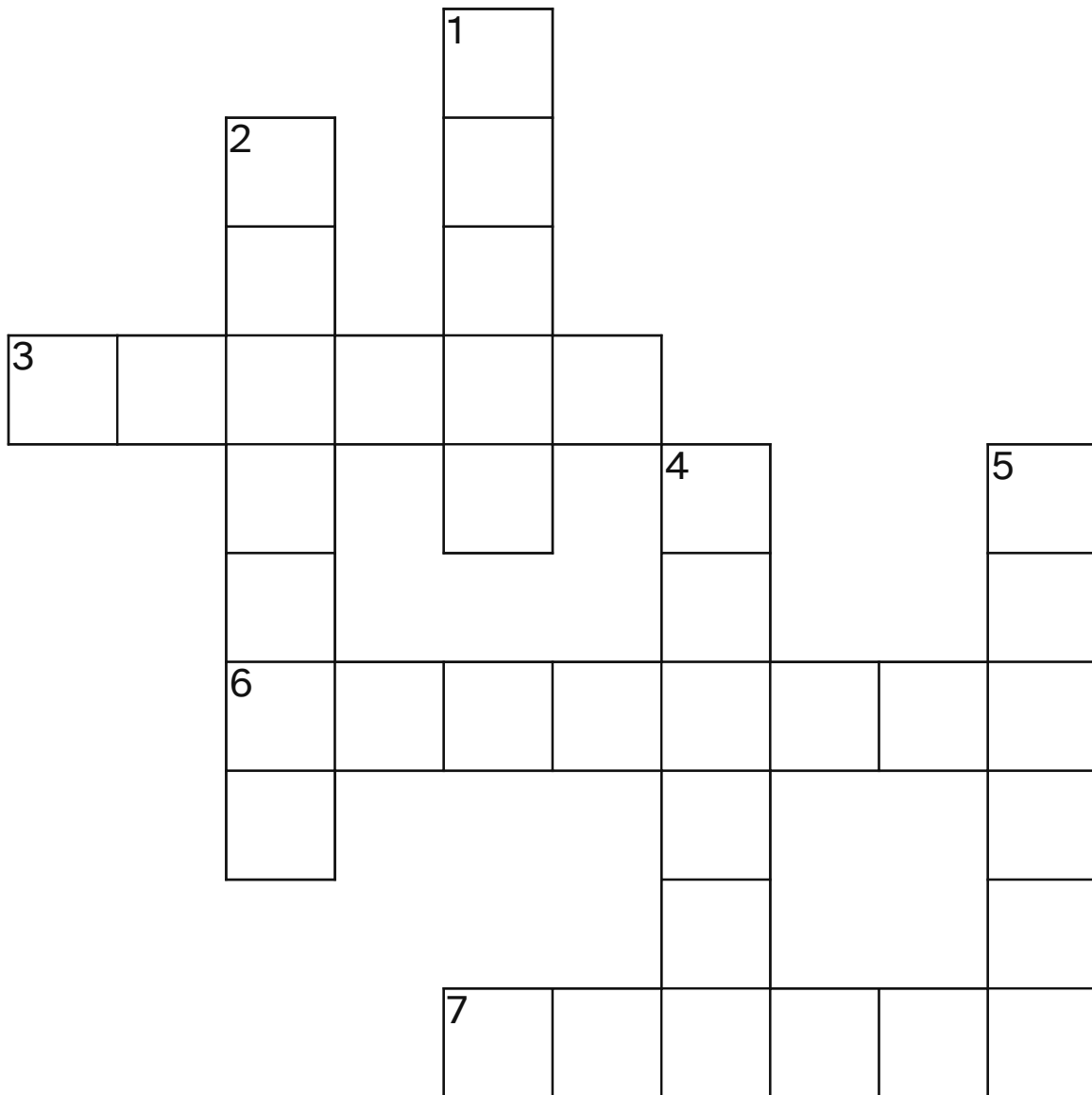
SALMON

SURVIVAL

WEIGHT

WINTER

A Big Bear Wins a Winter Survival Contest



ACROSS

- 3 Coldest season of the year
- 6 Ability to remain alive in hard conditions
- 7 Season after summer when weather starts to cool

DOWN

- 1 Large natural waterway flowing across land
- 2 Event where people or creatures try to be chosen winner
- 4 Measure of how heavy something is
- 5 Fish that travels from sea to rivers to lay eggs

Where this came from

This article was written for 3andB from the reporting below. It is not a reprint — the wording is ours and the facts are theirs.

BBC Newsround

“Winner of Fat Bear Week 2026 revealed”

Published Wednesday, September 30, 2026

Read by us on Wednesday, September 30, 2026

https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/articles/c5m27lp7y9d3o?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss

WHAT IS IN THIS PACKET

The article and its discussion questions, a word search, and a crossword.

COPYING AND REUSE

Free to print, copy and hand out for classroom use. Please keep this page with the packet, so the next teacher can see where the story came from.

More where this came from

If this short lesson worked for your class, our full workbooks go further with the same care:

- Complete units with student and teacher editions
- Worked solutions for every exercise
- Standards-aligned, classroom-tested, print-ready

See the full lessons at 3andB.com