

NEWFOUNDLAND: WORLD RECORD POTENTIAL?

by **Bill Vaznis**

Go East Young Man — For a Crack at the New World Record Black Bear!

In my view, it is an indisputable fact: The next world-record black bear will come off the island of Newfoundland. Sure, big bears can be found prowling about in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alaska, California and Arizona as well as North Carolina and Pennsylvania. In fact, a trophy bear, one big enough to claim the world-record title, might come from just about anywhere bear tracks can be found. But if you want to stack the odds in your favor, then you must take a long look at this island province.

According to Paul Saunders, senior wildlife biologist for big-game in Newfoundland, there is a stable population of between eight and ten thousand



black bears roaming the bush here. “Studies have indicated that Newfoundland bruins are larger in both body weight and skull size than bruins found on the mainland,” states Saunders. “These differences can be attributed in part to the availability of food, a mild climate and low hunting pressure. It is the source of food that is most important however. We now believe that Newfoundland black bears, and to some extent the black bears in northern Labrador, developed huge body sizes through evolution in order to take advantage of the caribou herds. (Moose are not native to the island, having been introduced in 1904, and therefore have not had enough time to be a genetic influence on today’s body or skull sizes of bears.) Today, bears are often spotted laying in ambush along caribou trails where adult caribou are quite vulnerable. And in the spring, up to 50% of the calf crop in some areas will fall to black bear predation.”

How big are the black bears of Newfoundland? I arrowed a record-book bruin several years ago on a two-week bow hunt with Ray’s Hunting and Fishing Lodge on the west side of the island. Although that boar tipped the scales around 425 pounds, I saw several other bears that easily dwarfed him, includ-



This big Newfoundland bear scored 21 11/16-inches by SCL and was taken during the 2007 season.

ing boars weighing 500-600 pounds on the pad plus a 675-725 pound behemoth that managed to outwit us. Indeed, five of the bait sites had front pad impressions around the bait barrel that measured between five and just under eight inches.

This past spring, a monster boar was tagged from Ray's Hunting and Fishing Lodge with a green skull score in excess of 22-inches. That boar easily pegged 500 pound scales! As of press time, this bruin was still at the taxidermist and had not yet been officially measured. "Black bears have been isolated on the island for thousands of years," says Broughton, "resulting in genetically superior sized bears. This coupled with vast stretches of untouched wilderness gives the serious black bear hunter an opportunity to take a world-class bruin. Indeed, even the skull from a modest 300 pound boar in Newfoundland will significantly outscore his counterpart from anywhere on the mainland."

I have also talked with several bush pilots who told me they periodically spot huge bears in the fall feeding out in the open on blueberries, bears so big they are initially mistaken for moose. Indeed, moose calves are also an important food source for the island's hungry black bears, and researchers have

documentation proving that mature boars have killed adult bull moose with one swipe from a powerful front paw.

Now, just because the island is crawling with gargantuan bruins, it does not mean they are easy to catch flat-footed. Far from it! They are among the smartest bears I have ever come across. In fact I believe you could make a case that they are indeed more intelligent than the average bear due to their increased skull size. When hunting these bruins, you must approach and exit your bait site without disturbing the area. Thus tree stand placement is critical and scent control is paramount. Once a mature boar knows you are after him, he is twice as difficult to get a shot at. Of all the big bears I glimpsed during my two-week hunt, I never had a repeat sighting. They are that cautious.

Dear Crocker has been guiding bear hunters for around 25 years. "This past spring we tagged five archery book bears, including two bruins that had skulls in the 20-inch class. We had several other bears visiting our bait stations that left front foot prints seven to eight and a half inches in width. One of my experienced bowhunters got a quick look at one of these giant bears. Its back was an easy six inches



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There is great potential for a record book bear from Newfoundland. This one was taken in 2007 and scored over 22-inches.

above the rim of a standing 55 gallon drum. We also stumbled upon a road kill that measured nine feet from the tip of his nose to the base of his tail. Now, those are big black bears anywhere!"

"There are several reasons why Newfoundland has an untapped population of behemoth black bears," adds Crocker. "Besides genetics, I believe the num-

ber one explanation is traditionally light hunting pressure. Local hunters are rarely interested in hunting black bears, not with healthy moose and caribou populations that can provide more meat for the table."

"The bush is also quite thick, limiting visibility, and making baiting the only viable hunting method. Even then many of these big bears are never seen at all, except every now and then when they venture out in the open to feed on berries. Add all this to the fact that much of the island is not baited, and you have all the makings of an untapped trophy bear paradise."

"Finally, it is my belief that the world-record black bear may have already been shot off the island. Outfitters as a group do not follow-up on big bear kills as we have done with caribou and

moose antlers. Several good skulls could have easily slipped off the island and never recorded by any of the record keeping organizations." states Crocker

Newfoundland offers both spring and fall bear hunts and also has a two-bear limit. For more information about the trophy potential of Newfoundland and Labrador, including maps, travel guides and a list of qualified outfitters, contact Newfoundland Tourism at 1-800-563-6353 or go on line at www.newfoundlandlabrador.com/huntingandfishing. 🐾

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