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Brant Ward / The Chronicle

The last California grizzly bear to live in San Francisco, Monarch, died 100 years ago this month. His body is exhibited at the California Academy of Sciences.

WILDLIFE

## California was once a grizzly's paradise

100 years ago, last captive bear died in San Francisco

By Peter Fimrite

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The last California grizzly bear to live in San Francisco stands inside a tinted glass case at the California Academy of Sciences, a tragic reminder of a species that humans extinguished.

The dark brown bear named Monarch was captured in 1889 in a publicity stunt concocted by newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst and kept for 22 years in a cage. California's last captive grizzly, whose image is on the state flag, died 100 years ago this month in Golden Gate Park.

Monarch was among the last of his kind, yet nobody apparently bothered to take down the exact day he died, according to academy officials, who searched their records and could only confirm that veterinarians put the elderly, infirm bruin

*Grizzly continues on A45*

# Beast of burden: no more California grizzly bears

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down in May 1911.

No ceremonies or displays are planned to memorialize the death of Monarch. Scientists are nevertheless well aware of his symbolic importance as an example of the damage mankind is capable of inflicting on our natural environment.

"We extirpated many other species along with the grizzlies ... and when we did that, we eliminated what was an intact, high-functioning ecosystem," said Healy Hamilton, the director of the Center for Applied Biodiversity at the Academy of Sciences in Golden Gate Park. "The impacts are still unfolding."

Indeed, the California landscape has changed dramatically since grizzlies were driven to extinction. Before the Gold Rush, the burly mammals roamed throughout much of California.

The bears with the distinctive hump on their backs thrived in the San Joaquin Valley and coast range, and caught salmon in the rivers that emptied into the San Francisco Bay and ocean in the Peninsula, East Bay, Marin County and San Francisco, according to numerous frontier accounts.

## Living the easy life

Susan Snyder, the head of public services for the Bancroft Library in Berkeley and the author of "Bear in Mind: the California Grizzly," said the abundant food and the Mediterranean climate in the California lowlands made life easy for *Ursus californicus*.

California grizzlies were said to be the largest and most powerful bears, growing up to 8 feet tall and weighing as much as 2,000 pounds, according to history books. It was estimated that there were 10,000 grizzlies in the state when European immigrants first arrived.

Early settlers described actual herds of grizzlies feeding in clover fields, with cubs in trees shanking branches for acorns, Snyder said.

"You don't see that kind of communal effort with other grizzlies," Snyder said. "In most other places where they live, it is a much harder

life. They hibernate and it's a desperate struggle to gain the weight they need to survive. They don't have that abundance of food that grizzlies had here. It was really paradise."

The end came rather quickly for the native bruins after people began pouring into California during the Gold Rush. The fearsome grizzlies stood their ground, refusing to retreat from the prime locations. Settlers shot and poisoned the bears to protect their livestock, and bounty hunters killed them by the thousands.

## Go capture a bear

They were already quite rare in 1889 when Hearst called San Francisco Examiner reporter Allen Kelly into his office and asked him to capture a live California grizzly bear that he could present to the city. Kelly spent five months looking for and attempting to trap bears when he finally heard that a group of Mexicans had caught a grizzly, reportedly along the rugged coastal wilderness of Ventura County, close to where the California condor recovery program is now operating.

"The bear made furious efforts to escape from the trap," Kelly later wrote. "He bit and tore at the logs, hurled his great bulk against the sides and tried to enlarge every chink that admitted light. Only by unremitting attention with a sharpened stake was he prevented from breaking out."

The bear was brought back to San Francisco on a train to great fanfare and a number of colorful Examiner stories about the heroic capture and struggle with the ferocious bear. The admittedly embellished stories depicted the bruin as California's last wild grizzly.

The Examiner reported that 20,000 people came to see Monarch on Nov. 10, 1889, as he brooded in a cage near Eighth and Brannan streets. The Examiner took full advantage, calling itself from then on the Monarch of the Dailies.

By 1894, interest in Monarch had waned. He was part of that year's

Forty Niner Mining Camp exhibit at San Francisco's midwinter exposition, where an exhibit of ostriches drew more spectators. Monarch lived from then on in a cage between what are now the tennis courts and AIDS Memorial Garden in Golden Gate Park. He had two cubs in 1904 with a female grizzly brought in from Idaho and was a symbol of strength for California after the Great Earthquake of 1906, but his life during two decades of captivity was pretty dismal.

"There are some really, really sad pictures of him in our collection," Snyder said. "He's just sitting there. He looks really depressed and lonely. It's all concrete and bars, like in an old style zoo."

Monarch was skinned and stuffed after his death. His skeleton is now in a box at the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at UC Berkeley. His skull, however, is missing. X-rays of Monarch's stuffed body at the academy of sciences indicate some of his skull may still be inside, but apparently not all of it.

## Model for the flag

Monarch, whose stuffed body was used as the model for the California flag in 1955, was not the last California grizzly, but he was close, Snyder said. A grizzly shot in Tulare County in 1922 has long been considered the last grizzly. Another grizzly was spotted several times in Sequoia National Park in 1924, but it subsequently disappeared.

Hamilton and other experts on biodiversity say grizzly bears influenced the California ecology by regulating prey populations and dispersing seeds in their stool, which helped with germination. They also stirred up soil while foraging for roots and plant bulbs and left salmon carcasses around as fertilizer, leading to greater plant and tree diversity, experts say.

"We think we are independent of the web of life, but we are all intricately linked and dependent on one another," said Hamilton, adding that numerous studies have shown that the removal of high-level pred-

ators has profound effects on the ecosystem.

Moe Flannery, the collections manager for the academy's ornithology and mammalogy department, said Monarch is an enduring symbol of the state.

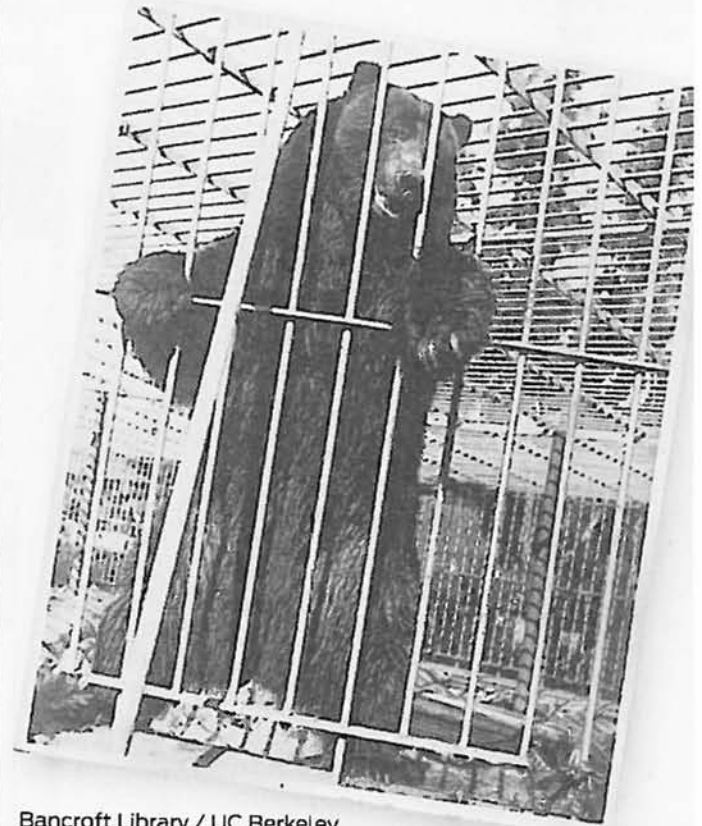
"He's probably the most important bear that has ever existed," she said. "A lot of people who come through here don't

even know that there were once grizzly bears in California. He helps educate people about extinction and represents maybe the lessons we can learn about nature and preventing future extinction."

Children regularly gawk at Monarch, whose showcase at the academy also features a California condor and northern

spotted owl, two endangered species that conservationists are desperately trying to save. The vanished symbol of California never got that consideration, which is why he is on display, an almost forgotten relic in a museum.

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Bancroft Library / UC Berkeley

**Monarch is seen in the cage he was kept in for 22 years. He was captured in 1889.**