

This true story tells the tale of the outlaw El Patron, a starving black bear who breaks into a poorly kept hunting camp. He is marked as a nuisance after he wrecks the place. The wildlife researcher sent to put him to death saves his life. The first night in his new home, however, the bear escapes. What will happen next to El Patron?

The Legend of El Patron

written by Virginia Parker Staat
illustrations by Andy Ramon

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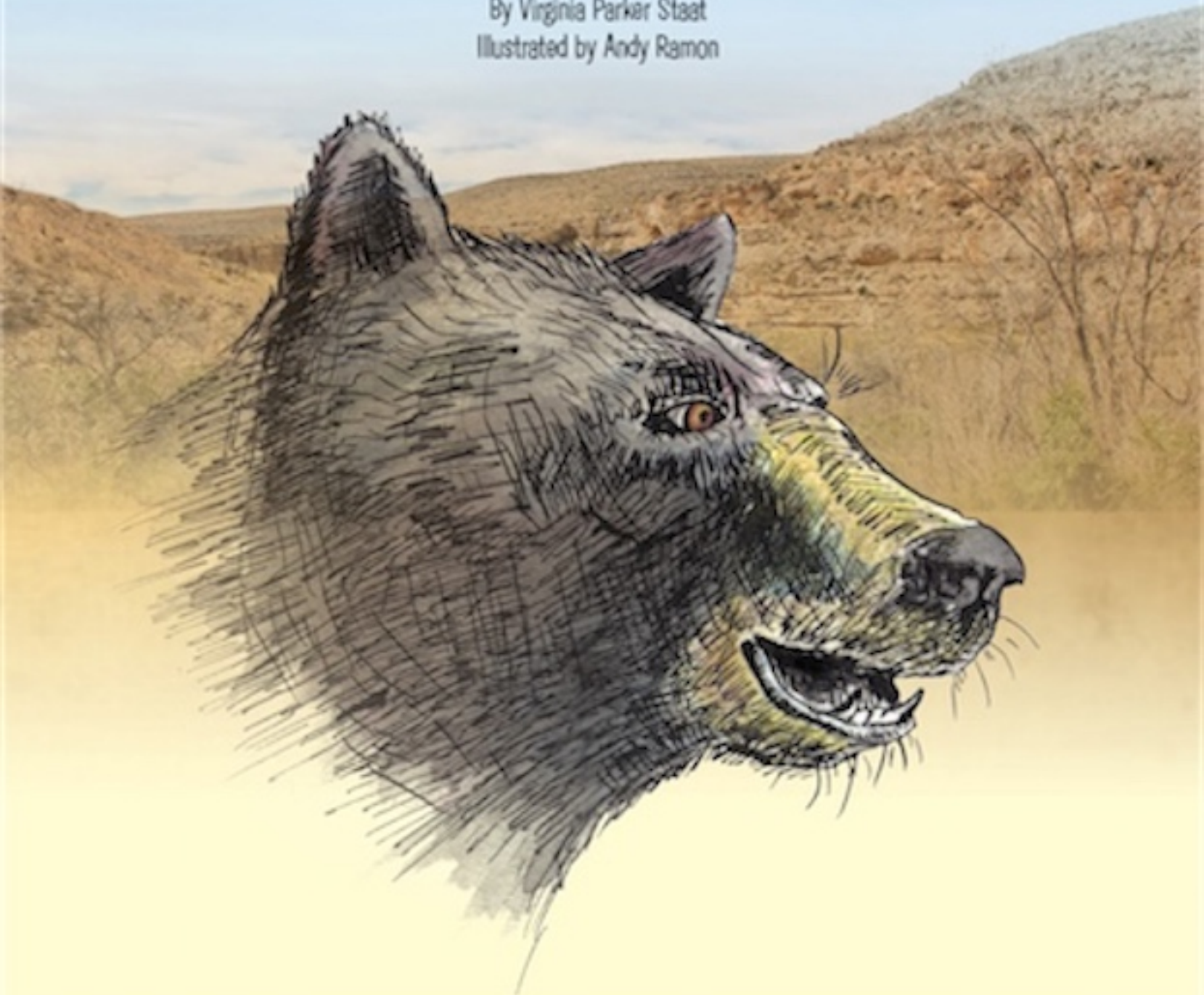
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Bonnie felt a wave of excitement when she spied the giant paw print on the canyon floor. She squatted to get a closer look. She knew that the print must belong to a new bear in the area—a big bear.

Much later, she would remember this moment as the beginning of the legend of El Patron. For now, Bonnie spread her fingers over the print. She had never seen a bear paw this large. She knew it must belong to an adult male. She immediately went back to her truck to set a trap to try to catch the bear.

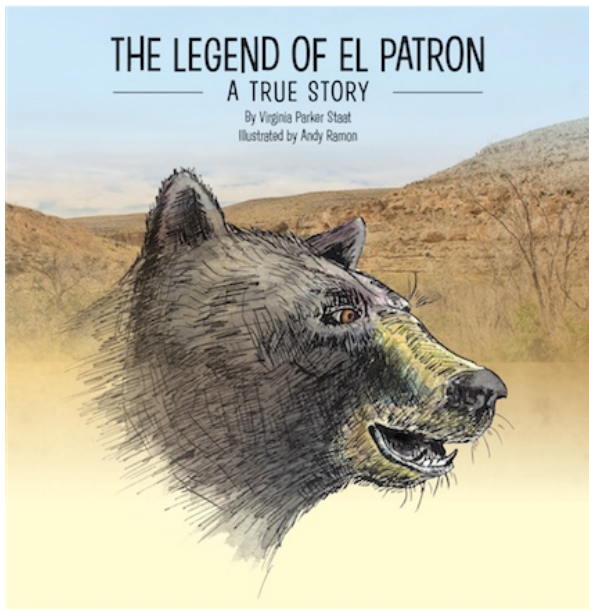
Beginning in September of 1998, Bonnie McKinney began a research project to study bears returning to West Texas. Although bears had once ranged throughout much of the state, they had disappeared by the 1950s. Their return to Big Bend country marked a rare and natural event. Never before had a large mammal reintroduced itself to an area without human help. Bonnie wanted to know where these bears had come from and why.

In the project's first month, Bonnie had captured and released five bears. She had fitted each with a radio collar. Now she radio tracked two yearling males, two adult males, and one yearling female. After seeing this new paw print, Bonnie eagerly prepared to trap the new big male.

By late October, Bonnie still had not caught the bear. In spite of seeing his tracks at almost every site, she only found the traps sprung and the bait taken. She continued setting traps almost daily.

It had not been so difficult capturing the other bears. A drought had gripped this lower Chihuahua desert for several years. Natural food sources such as acorns and Mexican persimmons were scarce.

With such constant hunger, bears quickly entered traps for the bait. But not the big male. He seemed to be an expert on springing the traps without getting caught. Although she admired his cleverness, Bonnie wanted more information about him.



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