

# YOU ARE IN BLACK BEAR COUNTRY



## Keep the “Wild” in Wildlife

National parks are great places to view wildlife in their natural habitat. However, once animals become accustomed to people, they are in danger of losing their “wildness”. **Habituated animals** (those that have lost their natural fear of humans) can be dangerous because they appear docile and may come too close to humans. By acting responsibly, you can help ensure that future generations have an opportunity to see wildlife that is truly wild.



Photo: Lynn and Donna Rogers

## Please...

**Do not disturb wildlife.** Give wild animals space (stay at least 100 metres away - approximately one football field), by not approaching too closely for a photograph or a better look. Bears, moose and other wildlife may react aggressively if they feel threatened by you or your pet.

**Do not feed wildlife.** It is illegal to feed wildlife in a national park. Wildlife find their healthiest food in their natural environment. Once they become accustomed to being fed by people, they stop looking for their natural foods and lose their fear of humans. These animals, no longer “wild”, are a threat to public safety.

## Avoid a Bear Encounter

### Do not surprise a black bear.

- Hike in a group... most bears will leave the area if they are aware of your presence.
- Stay on established trails and hike only in daylight.
- Keep children close at hand and within sight.
- Use extra caution when travelling near rushing water or into the wind. A bear may not be able to hear or smell you coming.
- Stay in the open as much as possible.

**Be alert! Watch for signs.** Tracks, droppings, diggings, torn-up logs and scratched trees may indicate that a bear is nearby.

### Use caution when travelling near natural bear foods.

Berries, fish and carrion (dead animals) are all food sources for bears, which they may defend. If you come upon any of these items, use extra caution; always report the presence of dead animals to park staff.

**Dog safety.** Dogs may infuriate a bear, inciting an attack. Your dog may then run to you with the bear in pursuit! Keep dogs on a leash at all times and never leave them unattended.

**Watch for cubs.** Bears may become aggressive if they feel their young are threatened. Never pass between a mother and her cub(s).

**Watch for area closures and bear warnings.** It is illegal to enter a closed area. Area closures are posted in places where bear activity poses a danger to visitors. Bear warnings are posted in areas when there is bear activity and the chance of an encounter is heightened. Use caution in these areas.

**Cyclists!** Your speed and quietness put you at risk for sudden bear encounters. Slow down through shrubbed areas and when approaching blind corners. Make noise, be alert and always look ahead.

## If You Encounter a Bear

Despite taking precautions, you may still encounter a bear. Remember that bears are complex, intelligent animals and no two encounters are alike. There is no single strategy that will work in each situation, but you can minimize your risk by following these guidelines:

**Keep calm.** Think ahead; your brain is your best defence against a bear attack. Plan how to respond if you encounter a bear.

**Don't run. Bears can easily outrun you.** By running you may trigger an attack. Make yourself less vulnerable. Pick up small children and stay in a group.

**Give the bear space.** Back away slowly and talk in a soft voice. Do not approach the bear or make direct eye contact.

**Leave the area or make a wide detour.** If you cannot leave, wait until the bear moves out of the way and ensure that it has an escape route.

**The bear may approach you or rear up on its hind legs.** Bears are often curious. If one stands on its hind legs, it is most likely trying to catch your scent; this is not necessarily a sign of aggression. Back away slowly and talk in a soft voice.

**Do not drop objects, clothing or food to distract the bear.** If the bear receives food, it will have been rewarded for its aggressive behaviour, thereby increasing the likelihood that it will repeat that behaviour again.

**Watch for aggressive behaviours.** A bear may display aggression by swinging its head from side to side; making vocalizations such as huffs, snorts, whoops, or moans; displaying teeth or claws; jaw popping; swatting at the ground; staring with eye contact; panting; or laying its ears back. These behaviours usually indicate that the bear is stressed, acting defensively and asking for more space. Attacks rarely follow. This is the most common kind of black bear aggressive encounter.

## If an Attack Occurs

Black bear attacks are rare! However, if one occurs, there are varying recommended responses depending on the situation. Remember that these are only guidelines and that each encounter is unique.

### Defensive attack:

If you surprise a bear and it responds to defend itself, its young or its food – and contact has been made or is imminent – play dead (lie on your stomach with your legs apart; protect your face, the back of your head and neck with your arms; remain silent; and if wearing a pack, leave it on for protection). Remember: such attacks are rare despite the much more common aggressive displays without contact by black bears. The bear will leave you alone once it believes the threat is passed.

### Offensive attack:

This is the most serious and potentially deadly attack a black bear might make! It occurs when a bear appears to stalk or follow you for a period of time and then chooses to attack; or the bear attacks you at night. **In this situation, playing dead is not appropriate.** Try to escape to a secure place such as a vehicle or hard-sided camper. Climbing a tree is an option, but remember that **black bears can climb trees easily.** If you cannot escape and a bear continues its pursuit, react aggressively and try to intimidate the bear. If this fails, fight back with anything at hand such as bear spray, rocks, sticks, knives or other possible weapons to let the bear know that you are not easy prey. Act as a group if you are part of one. Don't forget to yell; help may be close by.



Photo: Jean Morin

Chemical bear repellents/bear sprays contain a derivative of cayenne pepper. When sprayed directly into an animal's face, they cause eye and upper respiratory tract irritation. Although such sprays can be effective when used properly, wind and other circumstances may alter their effect on the animal. Therefore, use them with caution and always follow the manufacturer's directions. Bear sprays do not guarantee your safety.

## Parks Canada has a responsibility to protect wildlife and their habitat.

As a national park visitor, you share this natural area with bears and other wildlife that depend on it for their survival. Although bears are naturally wary of humans, they are unpredictable. By increasing your knowledge of bear behaviour, you can help reduce the likelihood of an unpleasant encounter, and at the same time, help protect the black bear population.

With your cooperation, bears and people can co-exist. By reading this brochure and following its recommendations, you will help protect both yourself and the bears.

For more information, talk to a park warden or other park staff.



Photo: Dave McArthur

## Bear Attractants

The following items may attract a bear to your campsite; so, ensure that they are all properly stored:

- Food
- Coolers
- Beverage containers (pop cans, beer bottles)
- Garbage
- Pet food/dishes
- BBQ grease
- Bird seed
- Oil/fat
- Fish and fish offal
- Perfumed items (soap, deodorant, toothpaste, sun tan lotion, insect spray, hair spray, etc.)
- Wastewater from cooking or doing dishes
- Tablecloths
- Pots, dishes, cups, etc.
- Plastic containers, even if they are not used for food storage.

## Camping in Bear Country

### Serviced Campground

**Bear-proof your food!** Become familiar with “attractants” (see Bear Attractants). Never leave these items unattended and store them in a vehicle or hard-sided trailer when not in use. Remember that hard-top/tent trailers are not bear-proof!

**Never cook in, or near, your tent or tent-trailer.** Dispose of wastewater from cooking or doing dishes in washrooms or at a dumping station. Clean up promptly after meals.

### Back Country

**Bear-proof your food!** Store all food and other attractants in bear-resistant food-storage facilities where provided, or suspend them between two trees (minimum of four metres off the ground and one metre from tree trunks). Bear-proof/air-tight food containers are an option if tree storage is unavailable. Avoid smelly foods (use dried or prepackaged food instead). Plan meals carefully to reduce leftovers. Store all dishes and pots with food.

#### Keep your sleeping gear and tent free of food odours.

Never cook in or near the tent as lingering food odours are an invitation to bears. Store the clothing you cooked in with your food in air-tight bags



or containers. Keep tent pads clean and free of food and garbage. If possible, cook at least 100 metres (approximately one football field) downwind from your sleeping area.

**Stash your trash!** Garbage should be placed in the park’s bear-proof garbage containers. If you store garbage at your site, keep it in a vehicle or hard-sided trailer. Keep your camping equipment, tent and tent-trailer clean and free of food odours.

**Dispose of wastewater** from cooking or doing dishes in a well-drained area downslope from your campsite and not near fresh water.

**Dispose of fish offal (remains)** in a fast-moving stream or in the deep part of a lake; never along stream sides or lake shores.

**Pack all garbage back out of wilderness areas.** Do not bury garbage as bears can easily locate and dig it out! If food scraps are burnt, pack out all unburned portions. Store garbage with food in air-tight bags or containers. (See notes on food storage above.)

**Use a flashlight at night,** it will help reduce the likelihood of surprising a bear and may warn wildlife away.

**Select an appropriate campsite.** Use designated sites when available. In random camping areas, pick a spot away from berry patches, animal and walking trails, and the sound of rushing water. Camp in open areas or near large, sparsely branched trees that can be climbed if necessary. Watch for bear signs; if present, choose another area to camp in.

## Problem Bears are Created by People

Black bears are opportunists, always on the lookout for “easy” calories. Once they find human food or garbage (if they become food-conditioned), they continue to seek it out from backpacks, picnic tables, coolers, etc. If they become accustomed to humans, their natural fear of people fades and they take more chances to find food rewards. These “spoiled bears” are unpredictable and may be aggressive.

Unfortunately, there is little that can be done to manage habituated, food-conditioned black bears. These bears often pay with their lives for human mistakes. The only true solution is not to create “problem bears” in the first place by making sure all food, trash and other possible bear attractants are stored properly.

## Threats to Black Bears

Black bear populations are being depleted as a result of habitat destruction, over-hunting, international trade and human ignorance. Solutions to help ensure the viability of bear populations include:

- coordinated land-use planning to manage increased development pressures from logging, mining and agriculture that have destroyed bear habitat
- increased cooperation among agencies and regulated hunting are required to prevent over-hunting
- legislation at federal and provincial/territorial levels, and support through law enforcement agencies, to control illegal trade
- proper food storage, garbage containment and collection, and land-filling practices to reduce the likelihood of food-conditioning.

#### How you can help

Do your part to limit human impact on wildlife and help ensure that future generations have the opportunity to see wildlife that are truly “wild”.

- If you spot a bear on the side of the road, consider not stopping.
- Bear-proof your campsite and keep it attractant-free.
- Before hiking, think about what bears are doing and how you can give them room.
- Use only official trails and leave wildlife trails to wildlife.
- Respect temporary and seasonal closures.

Remember that conservation isn’t just about bears; it’s about protecting the whole ecosystem. Wild spaces and wilderness values can survive as long as we strive to be stewards, not consumers, of wildness.

Photo: Dave McArthur