

Spotlight on Species

Be Black Bear Aware

American Black Bear

Latin name: *Ursus americanus*

Range

American Black Bears are found across North America, from Northern Mexico, to more than 30 US states, to all the provinces and territories of Canada, except for Prince Edward Island.

Appearance:

Black bears vary a great deal in both size and colour. Although black is the most common colour, there can be periods of time when black bears are shades of brown. Others have white coats (Kermode bears) and one of the rarest has a pale-blue coat (glacier bears). Both of these are found in British Columbia. The size of an adult male black bear can range from 50 to 75 inches and they can anywhere from 130 to 660 pounds. Adult females are also between 50 and 75 inches tall, but weigh 90 to 175 pounds. At birth, a cub usually weighs about 7 to 11 ounces.

Diet:

Black bears are omnivores and will feed whatever is available: insects, nuts, berries, grasses and other vegetation, as well as meat, such as deer or moose, particularly the young. Salmon is also a common food for black bears in British Columbia. Black bears are opportunistic feeders. They will eat whatever is easy to get and available.



THE BEAR FACTS

- The biggest black bear ever found weighed 948 pounds!
- Bears sometimes spend up to 20 hours a day feeding
- Bears in the wild live 20-25 years
- Black bears prefer forested areas. Male black bears home ranges are up to 500 square km.
- Tips for hiking or walking: Make lots of noise – sing, clap, blow a whistle.



It's up to you!

More than 1000 bears are killed every year in British Columbia because of bear-human conflicts. Almost of all of these bears were attracted into neighbourhoods by improperly stored garbage and other attractants.

By taking measures to Bear proof your home, you can help to protect bears and potential bear-human conflicts.

Main Attractants for Bears in our Communities

GARBAGE

Garbage is a major attractant that brings bears into our communities. The solution to this problem is to make sure that garbage is properly secured. Never leave garbage out overnight. Use a bear proof garbage can. Contact the RDOS at (250) 492-0237. Store garbage as securely as possible (inside the house, in a sturdy shed, freeze any pungent foods). Create less garbage by practicing the three R's: recycle, reduce and reuse.

FRUIT TREES, GRAPES & NUTS

Fruit trees are a big attractant for bears in the South Okanagan Similkameen. The best safety practices include: Electric fencing, removing unused fruit trees, cleaning up wind-fall fruit as soon as possible, harvesting fruit immediately, working with neighbors to help each other out with fruit.

COMPOST

Composting is good for the environment, but must be done properly so that it is not an attractant for wild animals. Do not put meat, fish, oils, milk or leftovers into compost. Rinse eggshells before composting. Turn compost regularly to keep it as dry as possible. Cover kitchen waste with soil. Construct a compost bin, rather than just having a heap. Locate your compost away from natural forest coverage, as well as away from any entrances to your home. Consider fencing around your compost. Use organic (worms) composting methods. Use agricultural lime to cut down on compost smells.

AGRICULTURE

It is important to properly protect and secure all agriculture. Use electric fencing around all livestock. Animals sheep-size or smaller are at the highest risk. Keep pens and cages away from vegetation coverage. Uses electric fencing around beehives, or place the hives on tall metal platforms, as they are difficult for bears to climb. Please contact OSCA for a Bears and Agriculture Fact Sheet at (250) 492-4422 or outreach@osca.org

BIRD FEEDERS

Bears love bird feeders. Make sure that there are no birdseeds on the ground. Store bird feeders and seeds indoors during bear season (spring-fall). Birds do not need to be fed during bear season as there is enough natural food around. If you enjoy having birds in your yard, plant bright flowers and use bird-baths.

PET FOOD

Feed your pet indoors if possible. Bring pet dishes and leftovers indoors every night. Always store pet food indoors.

BARBEQUES

Bears can smell one hundred times better than any human, so be sure to never leave something that smells good unattended. Properly clean the barbeque after every use-scrub and burn off the grill. Store the barbeque covered and secured. Do not leave dirty utensils, sauce or leftovers outdoors overnight.

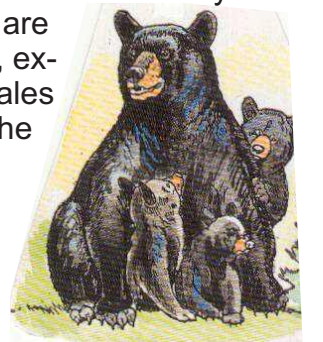
The Legend of the Black Bear

The black bear is called the **SKMXIST** in the syilx language. In legend times he is the Grand Chief of all the four-legged animals and is one of the four food chiefs from our legend stories. The black bear is considered a great teacher of survival and is always respected by SYILX nation. If a black bear is to be killed for whatever reason, ie rouge or aggressiveness, even then certain SYILX protocols must be followed in dealing with the dead bear. The stylized symbol of the bear track is one of the symbols used by some of the bands in the Okanagan as a sort of recognition that the user of that symbol is an Okanagan. However, it is not to be considered as the only crest or symbol for being Okanagan.

– Richard Armstrong

Reproduction:

Breeding season is June, July and August, and the two bears will remain together for only a few hours or at most several days. Black bears are very solitary, except for females with cubs. The pregnancy lasts about 220 days, with cubs being born in January and February (in a maternity den). The litters range between 1 and 5 cubs, though 2 is the average. Cubs stay with their mothers for about a year and a half, so mating is limited to every two years.



Senses

Black bears have an exceptionally keen sense of smell and rely primarily on their nostrils to locate food and detect danger. The bear's hearing ability is excellent while eyesight is average to poor, although they are quick to detect movement.



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