QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE: **BEAR SAFETY**

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We share the Canadian wilderness with bears. Bear sightings are quite frequent in Canada, an integral part of exploring the back-country, and they rarely lead to conflicts. **As long as bears are not surprised, do not feel threatened, are not attracted by food or other scents, and are observed from a safe distance, they are typically not conflictual.**

In order to ensure that humans and bears do not become a problem for each others, and in order to avoid any potential conflict with black bears and grizzly bears, the following guidelines have been developed.

AVOIDING BEAR CONFLICTS

Bears are wild animals and conflicts can, as a result, be very dangerous. The best course of action is therefore to avoid close bear encounters altogether and elect instead to observe the animals from a safe distance. Most bears will avoid or flee humans if made aware of their presence. Making sure the bear can hear you, smell you, and/or see you is therefore extremely important.

- ► Avoid travel during early morning or in the evening, when bears are most active.
- ► Avoid areas where there is evidence of bear activity, such as fresh tracks, scat, claw marks or hair on trees, evidence of digging, torn up logs and stumps, day beds (shallow and cool depressions or holes, with piled up leaves or vegetation), or the presence of animal carcasses.
- ► Make a lot of noise to alert bears of your presence. This can be done with a bear bell, by talking, singing etc…
- ► Be particularly alert along stream and river beds, especially during the salmon run.
- ► Always use unscented cosmetics and deodorant.
- ► Keep an excellent hygiene in order to eliminate body odours.
- ► If you are a menstruating woman, you should use tampons instead of sanitary napkins.
- ► Do not sleep in the same clothes you used to cook your meals.
- ► Do not store any food, cosmetics or garbage with you in your tent.
- ► Avoid the use of smelly foods. Freeze-dried foods are best.
- ► Cook all foods besides freeze-dried foods at least 100 meters from your tent.
- ► Never approach a bear.
- ► Never feed a bear.
- ► Always keep dogs on leash.
- ► Stay with your group.

PROBLEM BEARS

Most bear attacks involve female with cubs, young bears (2 to 3 year old), injured or older bears, as well as bears used to human food.

Young bears may be curious about humans, unafraid, opportunistic, unable to forage for enough food, or may simply be attempting to establish dominance on a new territory. They may also have been driven away from a good feeding area by older bear, and may therefore become aggressive in their search for food. Injured bears or older bears are usually hungry, and therefore, may be aggressive in the presence of humans. Finally, bears that have ever experienced human food have associated humans with food, no longer fear humans as a result, and are therefore likely to become aggressive to obtain food.

NON-LETHAL BEAR DETERRENTS

Scare cartridges: Bangers, flares, and whistling screamers, to be used with a multiple-shot pistol, are easy to carry and can be deployed quickly.

Hand-held marine flares: String-activated flares are a good deterrent as they affect the animal sense of sight, smell and hearing. They can also be used as a beacon in case of emergency.

Bear sprays: Bear sprays have been found to be far more effective on grizzly bears, when sprayed directly in the eyes or nose of the animal, than on black bears, especially those conditioned to human foods or garbage. It is also important to note that bear sprays are inadequate in strong wind, rain, or heavy brush.

IDENTIFYING **GRIZZLY BEARS** (*Ursus arctos horribilis*)

The **nose** of the grizzly bear has a **concave** or **dished-in profile**, with a clear depression between the end of the nose and the forehead. The **ears** are **round** and **small**. The grizzly also has a very distinctive **shoulder hump**. Finally, the **claws are very long**, and up to 10 cm.

Some other characteristics specific to the species may not necessarily be helpful in quickly identifying a bear. Colours typically range from medium to dark brown, but may also vary from blonde to black. Although a mature grizzly bear is substantially larger than a black bear, reaching up to 500 kg in weight and over 2 m in height, size will greatly vary depending on the age of the animal.

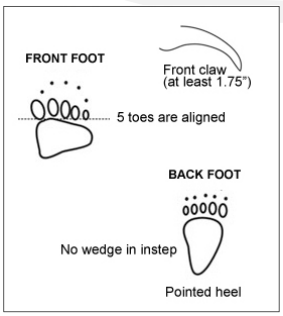
Grizzly bears also tend to favour open valleys and sometimes higher elevations, although they will gather near rivers and creeks to feed during the salmon run.

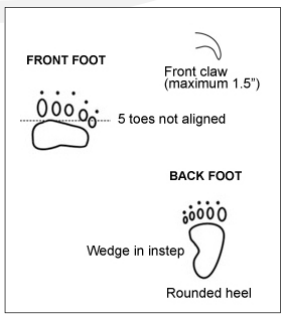
IDENTIFYING **BLACK BEARS** (*Ursus americanus)*

The **nose** of the black bear is **flat**, and constitutes a **straight line** between the eyes and the end of the nose. The **ears** are typically **larger** and **pointy**. Black bears do not have a shoulder hump, and their **claws** are much **shorter**, at around 4 cm.

As with the grizzly bear, colour and size may not necessarily be indicative of the species. A black bear may vary greatly in colour, from almost white, to cinnamon, brown or black. A mature black bear is also typically smaller than its grizzly relative, reaching only 180 kg in weight and 1.5 m in height. Its size will however greatly vary depending on age.

Black bears typically prefer forested areas and clearings in lower elevations over open valleys and higher elevations, although they may gather near rivers and creeks to feed during the salmon run as well.





IN THE EVENT OF A CLOSE ENCOUNTER WITH A BEAR

Your course of action will greatly vary based on the circumstances of the encounter, the bear behaviour and also the bear species. **Generally, you will first have to slowly retreat, identify yourself as a non-threat, and calm down the bear. If the bear is still being aggressive, you will have to stand your ground. If all fails, you will have to play dead, unless the bear is continuing the attack, or you are dealing with a predatory bear. In such case you will have to fight the bear with all you've got.** Below are different situations with more specific courses of action, keeping in mind that no encounter and no bears are alike, and that a given strategy is never guaranteed to work in all circumstances.

THE UNAWARE BEAR

The bear's head is down, the bear is feeding, and seems unaware of your presence.

► Quietly and slowly move away from the bear, while keeping the animal in sight at all times for any sign of behaviour change, or any indication that the bear has become aware of your presence.
► Try to leave the area the way you came, or if this is not possible, make a wide detour to stay as far as possible from the bear.
► Do not make sudden movements.
► Do not corner the bear.
► Do not run.
► Do not turn your back to the bear.

If you cannot avoid a bear, calmly advise it of your presence, by talking to the animal slowly and calmly, slowly waving your arms and moving away, preferably upwind.

THE AWARE BEAR

The bear appears aware of your presence, but does not show any sign of aggression or stress, and is not moving directly towards you.

► Slowly move away from the bear, while keeping the animal in sight at all times for any sign of behaviour change.
► Talk to the animal slowly and calmly.
► Try to leave the area the way you came, or if this is not possible, make a wide detour to stay as far as possible from the bear.
► Do not make sudden movements.
► Do not corner the bear.
► Do not run.
► Do not turn your back to the bear.

THE CURIOUS BEAR

The bear is trying to identify you. It is being stationary, standing on its hind legs, or slowly swinging its head from side to side.

► Allow the bear to identify you as a human.
► Slowly move away from the bear, while keeping the animal in sight at all times for any sign of behaviour change.
► Talk to the animal slowly and calmly.
► Try to leave the area the way you came, or if this is not possible, make a wide detour to stay as far as possible from the bear.
► Do not make sudden movements.
► Do not corner the bear.
► Do not run.
► Do not turn your back to the bear.

In the event the bear approaches you, you must stop immediately and start talking to the bear again in a calm, slow and firm voice. Do not scream or throw anything at the bear as it may trigger an attack. Once the bear stops, resume moving slowly away.

Moving away from a bear that is not showing signs of stress or defensiveness will usually prevent any further problem.

THE DEFENSIVE BEAR

The bear is panting, growling, hissing, or huffing, quickly swinging its head, popping its jaw, displaying its teeth or claws, staring with eye contact, has its ears laid back on its head, is charging or bluff-charging from a distance, slapping its feet on the ground, swatting vegetation, or turning sideways to display its size.

The bear is perceiving you as a threat. This is most common for females with cubs, any bear defending a food cache, or any bear that is cornered or surprised. You need to convince the bear that you are not a threat nor do you intend to invade its personal space or territory.

► Do not appear threatening and talk to the animal in a calm yet firm voice.
► Retreat slowly, while keeping your eyes on the bear.
► Be sure the bear has an escape route and give the animal an opportunity to leave.
► Do not make sudden movements.
► Do not scream.
► Do not throw anything at the bear.
► Do not imitate a bear's defensive or aggressive behaviour as it would be seen as a challenge to its dominance.
► Do not corner the bear.
► Do not run.
► Do not turn your back to the bear.

In the event the bear approaches you, you must stop moving immediately and start talking to the bear again in a calm, slow and firm voice. Once the bear stops, resume moving slowly away. If this is a mature grizzly bear, you may want to climb a tall tree. Mature grizzly bear claws are not designed to climb trees and they therefore rarely do so. They can however reach very far once stretched out, or simply try to knock a tree over. Black bears and younger grizzly bears on the other hand are very proficient at climbing trees, which make the option of climbing a tree unsuitable when dealing with these types of bear. You may also attempt to drop a non-food article to temporarily distract the bear.

Moving away will usually calm the bear down. However, a female grizzly bear with cubs is likely to attack. A female black bear with cubs may not attack as long as her cubs can climb a tree to safety, and do not get separated from their mother.

THE BEAR COMING TOWARDS YOU (LESS THAN 50 METERS)

The bear is aware of your presence, is coming specifically towards you, and is now less than 50 meters from you.

The animal is most likely being dominant, aggressive, has associated humans with food, and/or has lost its fear of humans. Your response should therefore dramatically change.

► Use your bear deterrent, if available.
► Act aggressively.
► If you are with a group, get close together.
► Climb on a rock or log to look as tall as possible.
► Wave your arms and climb on a rock or log to look as tall as possible.
► Shout at the bear.
► Stare in the bear eyes.
► Show your teeth.
► Speak in a loud an aggressive manner.
► Stomp your feet while taking a couple of steps towards the bear.
► Threaten the bear with whatever you have (rocks, sticks, etc).

Do not play dead with a bear that has lost its fear of humans!

THE CHARGING BEAR

The bear is coming at you at high speed, on all four legs, with its body crouched low on the ground.

Although many charges are bluffs and the bear will often stop or veer off just at the last minute, it is impossible to know whether a bear is really charging you until the animal is too close. You should therefore consider a charging bear as being an attacking bear. First use your bear deterrent if available. If no bear deterrent is available, or if the bear is still charging:

► Use your bear deterrent, if available.
► Get down on the ground on your stomach, protecting your vital organs and your face, with your hands locked behind your neck. If you have a backpack, it will provide extra protection.
► Do not scream or struggle as you are trying to convince the bear that you are dead.
► Remain still and wait for the bear to leave once the attack has stopped.
► If the bear keeps biting you, it is being predatory and you should therefore now fight it back as hard as you can, aiming at the nose and eyes, with the goal to hurt the animal.

In the event of a charge by a predatory bear, you should not play dead, and you should fight the bear as hard as you can, with whatever you have, aiming at the nose and eyes, with the clear goal to hurt the animal, or even kill it.

THE ATTACKING BEAR

The bear is charging, or is placing itself in attack position by looking directly at you, possibly with its head lowered and its ears laid back on the head.

► Use your bear deterrent, if available.
► Get down on the ground on your stomach, protecting your vital organs and your face, with your hands locked behind your neck. If you have a backpack, it will provide extra protection.
► Do not scream or struggle as you are trying to convince the bear that you are dead.
► Remain still and wait for the bear to leave once the attack has stopped.
► If the bear keeps biting you, it is being predatory and you should therefore now fight it back as hard as you can, aiming at the nose and eyes, with the goal to hurt the animal.

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THE STALKING BEAR

The bear has already identified you as a human, and does not show signs of stress or defensive behaviour. Instead, the bear shows intense interest in you, circles you, follows you, or make cautious approaches.

A stalking bear is acting in a predatory way, in the sense that it may see you as a meal. This type of occurrence is rare.

► Use your bear deterrent, if available.
► Act aggressively.
► If you are with a group, get close together.
► Climb on a rock or log to look as tall as possible.
► Wave your arms and climb on a rock or log to look as tall as possible.
► Shout at the bear.
► Stare in the bear eyes.
► Show your teeth.
► Speak in a loud an aggressive manner.
► Stomp your feet while taking a couple of steps towards the bear.
► Threaten the bear with whatever you have (rocks, sticks, etc).

You should never play dead with a stalking/predatory bear! Instead, you should appear as tall and as aggressive as you can.

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