

Living with Wildlife in BC

BLACK BEAR #1

“Living with Wildlife” is a series of nine wildlife management guides for the agricultural and natural resource sectors, as well as rural land owners. Options for wildlife management, worker safety, and animal deterrents are provided for each species. Many guides suggest completing wildlife conflict management plans. Web links to the guides and other resources are on the back page. Consult the “*Conflict Reduction Guide*” for wildlife deterrent management options.



Black Bear: *Ursus americanus*

The Black bear is the most common bear in Canada. One quarter of Canada's Black bears live in BC (120 to 160,000). Black bears have traits that allow them to be well adapted to living in the wilderness and to thrive in close proximity to humans and cultivated areas. Bears can be encountered almost anywhere in the province. They are generally tolerant of humans, and prefer to be left alone, undisturbed. Understanding bear behavior is important when it comes to avoiding conflict.

Black bear:

- Stand about 89-102 cm/35- 40” at the shoulder when on all fours and reach between 137-142 cm/56-72” in length.
- Mature males (boars) live alone, and reach a weight of about 155-225 kg/350-500 lbs. The average weight for a mature female (sow) is about 122-175 kg/275- 400 lbs.
- Coat colouring ranges from cream (Kermode or Spirit Bear), cinnamon, brown, brown/black to black.
- Sows give birth to 1 to 3 cubs in the den, often with last year's cubs in the den with her.
- Cubs spend up to 15 months with their mother before she actively sends them away.
- Lifespan can be as high as 30 years but averages between 20 and 25 years
- Caloric requirements range between 4000 calories/day in spring to more than 20,000 calories/day in late summer and fall.
- Bears slumber in a den from approximately mid-November to late March; they do not technically hibernate and will lose up to 30% of their body weight over the winter
- Boars have been known to attack cubs, making sows extra protective from March to June.
- Are omnivores (meat and vegetation) and will eat or try almost anything including diapers and gas containers.
- Possess a sense of smell five times better than a bloodhound (250 times better than a human) and have good eyesight.
- Can sprint short distances at 50 km per hour and climb trees and fences at nearly half that speed.
- Prefer to live in a home range where they were raised about 25 km radius for males, and 12-15 km radius for females.

On the Land

Management Options

A Wildlife Conflict Management Plan advises:

- A tidy operation is least likely to attract bears.
- Use secure containers for all garbage and waste.
- Consider wildlife proof containers for any human food waste.
- Keep a buffer zone of cleared brush on the perimeter of the property to create a visible 'break' in bear travel pathways and improve sight lines for workers.
- Flail all remaining fruit or produce after harvesting to reduce opportunistic feeding.
- Always make sure compost sites or dump areas are placed in areas furthest from any possible conflict.
- Animal feed and shelters are a major attractant. Keep corrals, pens and runs clean and secure all feed, feed additives, and supplies.
- Consider electric fencing.

See *Environmental Farm Plan* Chapter 3
<http://bit.ly/EnvFarmPlan>

See back page and **Conflict Reduction Guide** for in depth discussion of bear fencing and other management options.



Damage by bears in the agricultural sector has been increasing in recent years. The factors behind this upswing is most likely the result of several factors: increased numbers, reduction of wildlife habitat, expansion of agriculture adjacent to natural areas, and changes in crops.

Bear damage consists of consumption, breakage and damage to forage, corn, and vegetable crops, grape vines, berries, fruit and nut trees. Harm extends to molestation of livestock, fowl, and bee hives. Bears can damage buildings, worker housing, access and ruin agricultural supplies. Loss of productivity due to bear activity through interruptions of work and damage repair, all add up to significant monetary losses.

The perennial nature of agriculture, providing a stable unnatural food source, and a bear's pre-programmed instinct to live and reproduce within their home range can cause recurring bear issues. Bears will return again and again to food sources that are easy to obtain and where no negative consequences are encountered.

A Wildlife Conflict Management Plan can reduce the incidence of damage or trespass from wildlife. A management plan includes:

- an on-site evaluation to assess past and current operations by identifying potential conflict sites and safety concerns:
- Property points:
 - a. outbuilding, worker shelters, and shed vulnerability
 - b. eating, break - time or campsite areas
 - c. worker safety
- once the evaluation is complete, conflict reduction options can be explored and a plan can be implemented
- assign a person to implement the plan including worker education

On-site evaluations and forms can be accessed by agricultural operators. Contact:

Ms Zoe Kirk

RDOS WildSafeBC Community Coordinator:

Ph: 250-492-0237 ext 4110 cell: 250-488-0285

TF 1-877-610-3737

zkirk@rdos.bc.ca or rdos@wildsafebc.com May 15 to November 30

Worker Safety

Farms, orchards, vineyards and livestock operations are often located in wildlife interface or natural areas where bears and other wildlife live. It is important to understand which predators or wildlife conflict situations may occur where you are working and be prepared to keep yourself and others safe.

1. Having a **Worker Action Plan** is the best defence to avoid encounters.
2. As part of personal safety, research and ask your employer for information on the wildlife you are most likely to encounter.
3. Understand bear biology and behavior traits.

To avoid an encounter:

Be Alert: keep a watchful eye out for movement or activity on the perimeter of the work area; be ready to alert others

Noise: making noise lets bears know you are in the area; radio, moving machinery, the sound of human voices, and auditory scare devices

Food: keep all food and drinks in sealed containers and store used wrappers and uneaten food and drink back inside the container

Keep pets on a leash: dogs are a good first warning of intruders, but can also be prey, and can lead the bear back to you. Keep pets indoors or close by at night.

If an encounter occurs:

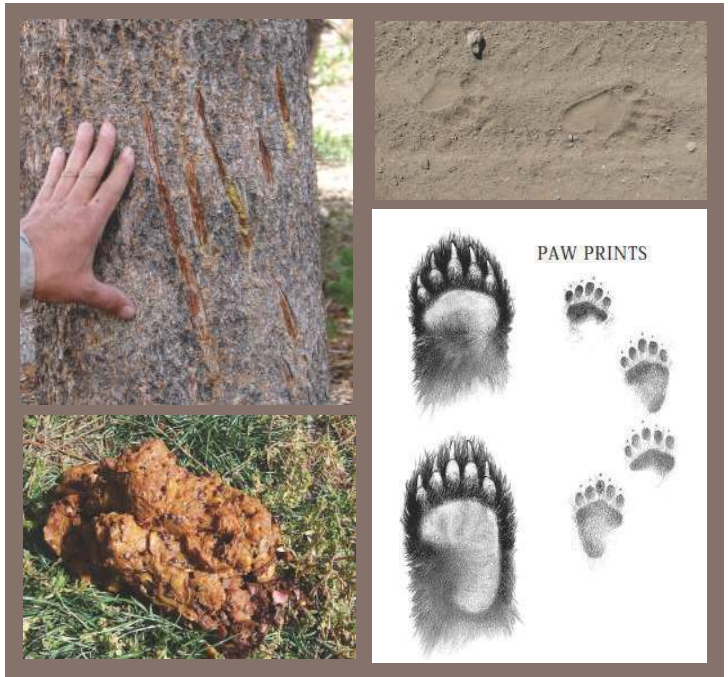
Stay Calm: stop, assess the situation, speak in a low voice, and alert those around you.

Move Slowly away from the area, (if the bear has not seen you) keeping an eye on the bear – alert others and your supervisor

If the bear comes towards you: slowly raise your arms and in a low voice speak directly to the bear, “Whoa Bear” Lower your dominant arm to reach for and prepare your bear spray. Begin to back away allowing the bear to see you are a human, not a threat, and that you are moving away. If the bear persists, yell and stomp – alert others. If possible, deploy an air horn with repeated short 3 second blasts.

If the bear still continues towards you: if the bear is intent on coming at you, when it is within 5 meters/15 feet, deploy the bear spray directly at the bear. Start from just above the ground sweeping upwards and slightly over the head of the bear to form a cloud the bear must move through. See Resources and Contacts page for links to “how to use bear spray”

Black Bear attacks are extremely rare, but knowing how to respond may save yourself and others



DO

- ✓ be “Bear Aware”; have a plan and know what to do
- ✓ watch for signs of bear activity
- ✓ always position a designated look-out when sightings have occurred
- ✓ implement a daily perimeter search for recent activity and access points
- ✓ carry a recognized “Bear Spray” and air horn, and wear the bear spray on your dominant side

DON'T

- ✗ leave garbage open and accessible where workers frequent
- ✗ work alone or send workers out alone when bears are active
- ✗ wear earphones, ear buds, or anything that deadens surrounding sounds
- ✗ feed or leave uneaten lunches for any wildlife

Contacts & Resources

“Living with Wildlife in BC” management guide series:

- # 1 Bear
 - #2 Cougar
 - #3 Coyote & Wolf
 - #4 Rodents
 - #5 Snakes
 - #6 Starlings
 - #7 Ungulates
 - #8 Conflict Reduction: mitigation options for wildlife safety and control
- Mitigation Decision Matrix: calendar of wildlife occurrences and recommended controls

The wildlife guides are built on the work of government ministries and wildlife and conservation organizations who generously shared information, reviewed and contributed to this series. Authors: © 2013 Margaret Holm and Zoe Kirk. Project Sponsor: Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance (OSCA), contact outreach@osca.org.

The “Living with Wildlife” series is available for downloading and distribution (personal, noncommercial use) on the following websites:

www.osca.org “Living With Wildlife” pages
<http://www.rdos.bc.ca/departments/public-works/wildsafe-bc-bear-aware/>
www.bcwgc.org Health and Safety Section

Consult Guide #8 Conflict Reduction, for details on bear deterrent management, electric fencing and safety management for bears.

Wildlife Deterrent retailers for fencing:

Margo Supplies <http://margosupplies.com/public/canadian1/index.html>
R&S Power Fence 645 Main St. Penticton, BC V2A 5C9 250-492-7090
<http://electricfence.homestead.com/>

Wildlife Deterrent retailers for devices and kits:

Margo Supplies <http://margosupplies.com/public/canadian1/index.html>
True North Outdoors Store <http://trueoutdoors.ca/> Vernon, Kamloops Kelowna, Penticton
Bear Scare (training courses available as well) <http://www.bearscares.ca/>

Resources:

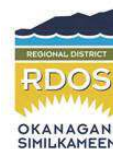
Bear Aware Web Site <http://www.bearaware.bc.ca>
WildSafeBC web Site <http://learn.wildsafebc.com/index.php>
BC Conservation Officer Service <http://bit.ly/COServeHumanWildlifeConflict>

Bear Spray is available at most Outdoors Stores, Hunting Outfitters, and Canadian Tire
Deer/Dog Spray is available at Canadian Tire Stores across BC (not restricted)

References and credits:

Biology - www.bearaware.bc.ca, BC Conservation Officer web site - <http://bit.ly/COServeHumanWildlifeConflict>
Safety - www.bearaware.bc.ca, BC Conservation Officer web site - <http://bit.ly/COServeHumanWildlifeConflict>
BearScare web site: www.bearscares.ca, Dan LaGrandeur
On the Land – Zoe Kirk, WildSafeBC Coordinator, RDOS Penticton, BC
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