

Contact

For more information about bears, contact any Fish & Wildlife office, or visit Sustainable Resource Development's "Bears in Alberta" website at srd.alberta.ca.

Preventing bear encounters is the best option for people and for bears.

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Preventing Bear Encounters

It is very difficult to predict how a given bear will react in an encounter with people, so it's important to learn how to avoid an encounter in the first place.

In campgrounds:

- Always keep your campsite free of garbage.
- Store food (including pet food) and toilet articles such as soap and toothpaste in the trunk of your vehicle; *never* take these items into your tent or tent trailer.
- Seal garbage in plastic bags; use bear-proof bins to dispose of garbage.
- Water used for cleaning dishes and bathing should be disposed of in toilets or sealed in plastic bags and placed in bear-proof bins.
- Never burn scrap food; bears have an extremely good sense of smell and are attracted by food odours.
- Use designated fish cleaning stations; *never* clean fish at your campsite.



Black Bear

- Keep young children close at hand, especially at night, dawn and dusk.
- Always keep pets on a leash or better yet, leave your pet at home (*loose dogs can attract and irritate bears*).
- At night, use a flashlight and move cautiously in and around your campsite.

On day hikes and fishing trips:

- Make plenty of noise when approaching blind corners, dense shrubs and streams, and when walking into the wind; a loud shout every few minutes is more effective than wearing bear bells.
- Hike in groups and during daylight hours.
- If you see signs of recent bear activity, go back the way you came; it's better to cut your hike short than to risk an encounter with a bear.
- If you clean your fish in the backcountry, puncture the air bladder and throw the entrails into the lake or stream; seal the fish in plastic bags; wash your hands to remove fish odours.
- Pack out all garbage in sealed bags.

- All bears can be dangerous and should be treated as such.
- Never feed or approach a bear.
- Avoid female bears with cubs; never go near a cub – a mother bear will aggressively protect her young.
- Remember to give bears a wide berth; they may look large and clumsy, but they can run much faster than people, both up and down hills (as fast as 65 kilometres per hour for short distances).

On backpacking trips:

- Follow all of the preceding precautions.
- Inform authorities, family or friends of your destination and estimated return time.
- Use a portable camp stove and dried or pre-cooked foods that don't have strong odours.



Grizzly Bear

- Use designated backcountry campgrounds or camp in open areas away from game trails, streams and lakeshores.
- Make sure your cooking area is 100 metres from your sleeping area to prevent food-odour contamination. *Never sleep in clothes worn while cooking.*
- Hang food, garbage and equipment between two trees to discourage bears from investigating them.
- Never burn or bury food scraps; always pack out your garbage.

Mountain biking in bear country:

- Because the speed and quietness of mountain bikes puts them at risk for sudden bear encounters, cyclists should:

- slow down in shrubby areas and when approaching blind corners;
- make noise;
- travel in groups; and
- always watch ahead.

Hunting in bear country:

- Make every effort to remove a harvested animal in one trip or, failing that, in one day.
- If you must leave a carcass at a remote field camp or other location, hang it at least 100 metres from camp.
- Use extreme caution when approaching the carcass; make plenty of noise in case your kill has attracted a bear.
- If there is a bear at your kill site, *don't attempt to chase it away*. Leave the site and leave the carcass to the bear.

Always report a bear incident to the nearest Fish & Wildlife or Parks Division office.

Bear Management

Conservation officers sometimes have to remove a nuisance-bear from an area by live-trapping it. If you come across a bear trap *do not approach it*.

If you encounter a "problem bear" notice in the backcountry, leave the area immediately. It is illegal to enter an area that has been closed because of a problem bear. People who cross into such areas will be ticketed.

An objective of wildlife managers is to keep bears, especially females with cubs, in their ecosystem by using aversion techniques instead of relocation. For example, the Southwestern Alberta Grizzly Bear Strategy employs several innovative techniques such as removal of attractants, aversive conditioning, bear shepherding using Karelian bear dogs, road-killed wildlife carcass redistribution, and habitat management to reduce bear relocations.



Bear Smart

WILDLIFE



Alberta

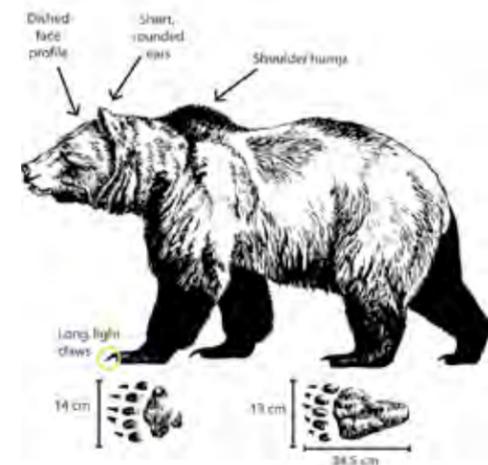
You Are In Bear Country – Be Bear Smart

There are two bear species in Alberta—black bears and grizzly bears.

Black Bear



Grizzly Bear



Bear Identification

- Grizzly bears have a pronounced shoulder hump.
- Grizzly bears may have silver or light-tipped guard hairs on head, hump & back; black bears may appear more uniform in colour. Both species can range in colour from blonde to black.
- The grizzly's ears are rounded and appear smaller overall; the black bear has pointed and more noticeable ears.
- The grizzly's nose is pig-like in appearance; the black bear's dog-like.
- Black bear claws are relatively short (approximately 2.5 cm in length) and are usually black. Grizzly bear claws are longer (approximately 7.5 - 10 cm in length) and may have a light-coloured strip.
- Grizzly and black bear tracks differ significantly, but in mud and snow they may be indistinguishable.

Note: be aware that; although grizzlies are generally the larger of the two species, some black bears are larger than some grizzlies.

Bear Sign

- Tracks
- Bear trails (bears are creatures of habit and return to familiar areas, creating trails)
- Scats
- Rolled logs and rocks (bears search for insects under these items)
- Torn stumps
- Rubbed, chewed and claw-marked trees
- Diggings
- Ant hills torn open

Bear Distribution in Alberta

Black bears prefer wooded areas and dense brush year-round. Grizzlies are most often found in the high country in late summer and early fall; in spring and late fall they inhabit valley bottoms.



Feeding Behaviour

Like us, bears are omnivores. Unlike us, they are opportunistic feeders that will eat almost anything, from toothpaste to ground squirrels. One of the ways in which bears gather food is by scavenging. They are quick to learn that when they see or smell humans, there's a good chance food is nearby.

A bear's diet is 75-90% plants and roots; the remainder is mainly insects, small mammals and animal carcasses. Both species eat the most digestible and nutritious foods available, depending on the time of year. Grizzlies are more apt to use foods from the soil, black bears from in and around trees.

Plant foods important to grizzlies include horsetail, buffalo berry and Hedysarum. Cow parsnip is important to both species. Berries that attract both grizzly and black bears include devil's club, wild sasparilla, raspberries, wild strawberries and wild blueberries. It is a good idea to avoid (or be especially alert in) areas where bear foods are abundant.

Bear-Human Encounters

Grizzly and black bear behaviour is similar in many ways, but there are differences:

- Black bears tend to be more tolerant of humans and often live near human settlements. Grizzlies tend to stay away from people.
- Black bears tend to be less aggressive than grizzlies.
- Black bears often climb trees to escape threats; grizzlies are not as good at climbing trees.
- Black bears prefer forested areas; grizzlies range throughout the landscape.

Although most bears are shy and will flee if they come across people, aggressive encounters sometimes occur and occasionally result in serious mauling. Aggressive confrontations can occur when bears are surprised at close range (especially females with cubs). Bears that are accustomed to eating human food may become aggressive as well.

There are no hard and fast rules about what to do during a bear encounter. Bears react to people in different ways in different situations. Reactions can be affected by the season, hunger, and availability of an escape route.

If you encounter a bear:

- Stay calm, size up the situation and try to determine if the bear is a grizzly or a black bear; back away slowly, talk softly and don't look it in the eye; in an encounter with a non-charging bear or a bear with cubs, you should appear passive; do not raise your voice.
- Never run; you can't outrun a bear and running may excite the bear and cause an attack.
- Don't harass or chase the bear.
- If your vehicle is nearby, get in as quickly as possible.
- If there are cubs in the area, move away from them.
- Make every effort to leave the bear an escape route.
- Climbing a tree is an option but offers no guarantee of safety. Black bears are excellent climbers, and grizzlies have also been known to climb trees.

If a bear charges you

Your first strategy should be to act and appear non-threatening. The bear may simply be expressing its dominance. Once satisfied by a "bluff charge", it may retreat. Be aware that a bear may carry out several "bluff charges" during an encounter.

During a bear charge, experts recommend the following:

- Stand your ground; identify yourself as human by speaking in a calm voice.
- Avert your eyes – a direct stare is perceived as a threat.
- If the bear continues its charge and gets closer, you can try to intimidate it by making direct eye contact, jumping up and down and shouting. You can also use pepper spray if you have it.

Note: pepper spray is not a repellent; it is a weapon that is only effective in the animal's eyes and nose. It will not repel bears from a sprayed area; in fact, there is evidence to suggest that bears are attracted to objects covered with pepper spray.

If a bear attacks:

- The most common type of attack is defensive; the majority of bear attacks occur when the bear is surprised, especially when it has cubs or is protecting its food – it attacks because it sees you as a threat.
- In the event of an attack by a grizzly, playing dead may be an option – drop to the ground face down, interlace your fingers over the back of your neck and spread your legs to make it more difficult for the bear to turn you over. Fighting back with a grizzly has been known to increase the intensity of the attack.
- Defensive attacks normally last no longer than a couple of minutes. If it persists, it may mean that the attack has changed from defensive to predatory. In a predatory situation with a grizzly or black bear, where the bear seems to be stalking you, adopt a dominant stance—make direct eye contact, shout and act in a defiant manner.
- Most serious black bear attacks are predatory; playing dead is not a good strategy in reacting to a black bear attack. Instead, try to escape into a building or vehicle, or climb a tree (keeping in mind that black bears are very good climbers themselves); if no escape is possible, fight a black bear off with any available weapon such as pepper spray, sticks, stones, or even your fists; do whatever it takes to demonstrate that you are not easy prey.

