

Dispelling Bear Myths



Bears are one of the most adaptable and versatile mammals on earth. Their behavior stirs fear, awe, wonder, and curiosity in us. Unfortunately, there are still many myths surrounding the lives and behavior of bears that negatively impact our relationships with them. A greater knowledge of the behavior, ecology and habitat of bears is crucial if we are to learn to co-exist peacefully with these magnificent creatures.

Myth #1: Bears are Unpredictable

Fact: Bears use body language and vocalizations to show their intentions. Learning about bear behavior can be beneficial to people who live or recreate in bear country. Bears are normally shy, retiring animals that have very little desire to interact with humans. Unless they are forced to be around humans to be near a food source, they usually choose to avoid us.

Myth #2: A bear standing on its hind legs is about to charge

Fact: Actually, a bear standing on its hind legs is just trying to better identify what has caught its attention. As I'm sure you'll agree, it's much easier to see, hear and smell things from a standing position, than down on all fours. Bears see in color and have good vision, similar to humans.

Myth #3: Once a bear has tasted human food, he won't eat wild food any more

Fact: Bears prefer natural, wild food unless it is difficult to find and human food is too easy to get. Even the worst food-conditioned bears still eat natural foods whenever they're plentiful. The first rule of "Bear Smartness" is to not attract bears to areas frequented by humans. Conflicts usually increase when natural foods run out – a good time to be more vigilant of bear attractants on your property; such as bird feed, pet food, fruit trees/berry bushes, barbecue grease and compost.



ANIMAL CONTROL

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Myth #4: Bear bells are the best way to avoid a surprise encounter

Fact: It's best to alert bears of your presence by talking loudly, singing songs or breaking sticks. Make lots of noise. If a bear hears you coming, it will usually avoid you. Warn bears of your presence by talking calmly and loudly or singing, especially in dense bush where visibility may be limited or around rivers or streams where bears have trouble hearing you coming. Your voice will help identify you as human and non-threatening. Keep dogs on a leash and under control. Dogs may be helpful in detecting bears, but they may also agitate them and create a conflict situation – sometimes returning to their humans with the bear in pursuit.



Myth #5: Bears that wander into inhabited areas such as campsites, rural towns or cottage communities are dangerous.

Fact: It is nearly impossible for a bear to make its daily excursions without walking through someone's private property. Bears may travel hundreds of kilometers in their search for food. If you have stored your food and garbage properly, the bear will likely move on. Remember, problem bears aren't born they're created through mismanagement of human food and garbage. If bears are hanging around, something is attracting them.

Removing the attraction will usually solve the problem.



"By the way, your garbage can lid is loose."

Myth #6: Shooting or relocating a bear will solve the problem

Fact: Removing the bear and not the attractant will only create an opportunity for another bear to move in, creating a vicious cycle of conflict and killing. Bears are normally shy, retiring animals that have very little desire to interact with humans. Unless they are forced to be around humans to be near a food source, they usually choose to avoid us.