

Safety Guide to Bears in the Wild



IMPORTANT NOTICE

The *Wildlife Act* now prohibits feeding or intentionally attracting bears. Persons who do so are subject to penalties under the *Wildlife Act*.

Seeing a bear can be one of the most memorable experiences, but it is our responsibility to respect the bear in its home. This means we must not force bears to leave their habitat, teach them to eat human foods, or place bears in situations where people or bears could get hurt. Preparation and education are essential to ensure our encounters with bears in the wild are positive and free from conflict.

Bears are everywhere. We see them on the side of the highway, on logging roads, on the way to a campsite, near towns, or in the bush when hiking or working. Bears will usually hide from people, but remember: just because you don't see a bear, it doesn't mean they aren't around.

British Columbia has about one-quarter of all black bears in Canada, and half of all grizzly bears. Both species are found throughout the province, with very few exceptions. There are no grizzly bears on Vancouver Island or on the Queen Charlottes, for instance, and there are few or no grizzlies in the heavily-settled Lower Mainland or the dry, southern areas of the province.

Although BC is fortunate to have black bears and grizzlies occupying most of their historic range throughout the province, bears and their habitat face risks from increasing human development and access. There is only a small amount of inaccessible wilderness left in British Columbia, but there is a tremendous and growing human interest to spend leisure time in the wilds of the province. We must respect the fact that the wilderness is home to bears, and as visitors we must do our part to help conserve bears and their home.

Bear Safety Essentials:

- *Respect all bears* – they all can be dangerous.
- *Never* approach a bear.
- *Never* attempt to feed a bear.
- *Be defensive* – never surprise a bear.
- Learn about bears. Anticipate and avoid encounters.
- Know what to do if you encounter a bear.
- Each bear encounter is unique. No hard and fast rules can be applied when dealing with a potentially complex situation.

The Most Dangerous Bears Are:

- Bears habituated to human food.
- Females defending cubs.
- Bears defending a fresh kill.
- Cute, friendly, and apparently not interested in YOU.

About Bears:

- Bears can run as fast as horses, uphill or downhill.
- Bears can climb trees, although black bears are better tree-climbers than grizzly bears.
- Bears have excellent senses of smell and hearing, and better sight than many people believe.
- Bears are strong. They can tear cars apart looking for food.
- Every bear defends a “personal space”. The extent of this space will vary with each bear and each situation; it may be a few metres or a few hundred meters. Intrusion into this space is considered a threat and may provoke an attack.
- Bears aggressively defend their food.
- All female bears defend their cubs. If a female with cubs is surprised at close range or is separated from her cubs, she may attack. An aggressive response is the mother grizzly's natural defense against danger to her young.
- A female black bear's natural defense is to chase her cubs up a tree and defend them from the base. However, she is still dangerous and may become aggressive if provoked.



When In Bear Country:

- Avoid conflict by practicing prevention.
- Be alert.
- Look for signs of recent bear activity. These include droppings, tracks, evidence of digging, and claw or bite marks on trees.
- Make your presence known by talking loudly, clapping, singing, or occasionally calling out. Some people prefer to wear bells. Whatever you do, be heard! It doesn't pay to surprise a bear.
- Keep children close at hand and within sight.
- Photographing bears can be dangerous. Use a long-range telephoto lens.
- There is no guaranteed minimum safe distance from a bear – the further, the better.
- Stay away from dead animals. Bears may attack to defend such food.
- It is best not to hike with dogs, as dogs can antagonize bears and cause an attack. An unleashed dog may bring a bear back to you.
- Never leave pets unattended.

Children Should Not:

- Run or play in areas with dense bush.
- Play unsupervised in bear country.
- Make animal-like sounds while hiking or playing.
- Approach bears, especially bear cubs.
- Be encouraged to pet, feed, or pose for a photo with bears, even if they appear tame.

If You Encounter A Bear At The Roadside:

- *Remain in your vehicle.* Don't get out even for a "quick photo".
- Keep your windows up.
- Do not impede the bear from crossing the road.
- If you park to view bears at a distance, leave your car well off the road to avoid accidents.

Your Food And Garbage:

- It is illegal and dangerous to feed or attract bears with food, food waste or any other substance that could attract bears.
- Odours attract bears. Reduce or eliminate odours from yourself, your camp, your clothes, and your vehicle.
Don't sleep in the same clothes you cook in.
- Store food so that bears cannot smell or reach it.
Don't keep food in your tent – not even a chocolate bar.
- Properly store and pack out all garbage.
- Handle and store pet food with as much care as your own.



The Government of British Columbia also has a [Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy](#).

For more information please contact:
Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection
[Wildlife Branch](#)

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