

Staying Safe in Bear Country

PHYSICAL TRAITS: Amazing noses and ears; eyes are good; strong and fast, good swimmers
Black bears are great at tree climbing. Black bears rarely attack defensively.

BEARS' MOTIVATIONS

- Food and the search for it dominate a bear's life
- Mating and raising offspring
- Investigating novel stimuli; curiosity
- Establishing and asserting dominance

DEFENSIVE INTERACTIONS

- Bear thinks you are a threat to itself, its cubs or its food.
- Usually you have accidentally approached it and entered into its personal space, surprising or crowding it. When this happens, the bear will most likely appear agitated and stressed.
- Closer you are to it before it becomes aware of you, the more likely it is to react defensively.
- Almost always stop short of contact
- The few defensive attacks by black bears have been females protecting cubs (but these are very rare).

NON-DEFENSIVE INTERACTIONS

- The bear may utter a series of huffs, nap (pop) its jaws and swat the ground. These are all warning signs that you are too close. Slowly back away.
- Black bears will sometimes "bluff charge" when cornered, threatened or attempting to obtain food. Stand your ground and slowly back away.

Most of bear safety is prevention.

IF YOU ENCOUNTER A BEAR AT CLOSE RANGE:

- Remain standing upright
- Avoid direct eye contact
- Back up slowly and speak in a calm, assertive voice
- Do NOT run.

AVOID BEARS WHENEVER POSSIBLE however when you do meet a bear.....

- Let the bear know you are human by talking and slowly waving your arms. Try to give the bear your scent
- Don't surprise bears – warn them of your presence. Make lots of noise. This is especially important when you are on a trail with restricted visibility, as well as those times when the wind is blowing towards you (bear will not have the benefit of your scent).
- Increase your distance from the bear even if it appears unaware of you and seems unconcerned. Make sure the bear has an escape route.
- Leave the area where you encountered a bear, report to Ranger
- If you hear vocalizations or see unattended cubs, be extremely cautious and leave the area silently the same way you arrived. Do not run, it could invite pursuit.

DON'T ATTRACT BEARS OR REWARD THEM WITH FOOD

Do not leave food out at any time. This is not just a rule for at night – but for all day too!
Soaps, lotions, and toothpaste can also attract bears and should be kept in air-tight containers and put away when not in use.