



Bear Country

Eldorado National Forest

Every year more people are enjoying their National Forests than ever before. The best camping and hiking areas are also the best bear habitat. Learning about bears and being aware of their habits will help you fully appreciate these unique animals and the habitat in which they live. Please do not contribute to the delinquency of the bears. Follow these guidelines when you are in bear country.

Camping Tips

Keep Your Camp Clean. Keep clothing, tables, grills, and camp stoves free of grease. Pick up and properly dispose of all food debris, bones, or garbage in the vicinity. Keep your tent and sleeping bag free of food smells. Do not keep in your tent the clothes you cooked in.

Store Your Food Properly. Seal all food in airtight containers. Store all food, related supplies, and ice chests in your car trunk, pickup cab, camper shell, or suspended at least 10 feet off the ground and 4 feet away from the tree trunk. Bear resistant containers can be purchased from outdoor stores. Bears recognize ice chests, cans, and backpacks, so store them as food. Also, store grocery bags and scented articles such as soap, hairspray, sunscreen and toothpaste. Cover them to hide them from view. Make sure your windows are closed!

Dispose of Garbage Properly. Put it in bear proof garbage cans where available or secure it with your food. **Never bury it.**

Sleep Well Away From Food or Dumpster Areas. It is best to sleep 100 yards away from properly stored food and dumpsters if possible, preferably upwind.

Hiking Hints

Never Approach Bears. Not even to take their pictures. Some bears may seem “tame” until you get too close or threaten their young. **LEAVE BABY BEARS ALONE.**

Make Noise. Most bears will avoid people and leave an area when they know people are present. Making noise allows the bear to move away before a confrontation occurs. Most bear attacks are caused when a bear is



startled at close range. Remember this is BEFORE you encounter a bear. Noise may initially deter a bear, but in close encounters it could aggravate rather than scare off the bear.

Safety in Numbers. Travel with friends and avoid hiking at night. Make sure children are close to you or at least within sight at all times. Roaming dogs can easily disturb a bear and may lead an angry bear back to you. Keep your dog on a leash.

If You Encounter A Bear

- ◆ Stay calm and give the bear room to escape.
- ◆ Make yourself appear larger by standing up, raising your arms and opening your jacket.
- ◆ Back away slowly while facing the bear. Running away from a black bear may stimulate its instinct to chase.
- ◆ Speak softly to the bear and try not to show fear.
- ◆ Fight back if a bear attacks. Use rocks, sticks, or any object that may be available.
- ◆ If all else fails, play opossum.

In most cases, bears are not a threat, but they do deserve your respect and attention. When camping and hiking in bear country keep alert and enjoy the opportunity to see these magnificent animals in their natural habitat.

Bear Facts

Are all Black bears black?

Despite its name, the Black bear can be honey-colored, blonde, brown, or black. They vary in size and weight, with the males generally larger (300-400 lbs.) than the females (200-260 lbs.). The largest reported is about 800 lbs. Bears may be active any time, day or night, most often during morning and evening twilight.

Do bears eat only meat?

Although classified as a carnivore, bears are actually omnivorous with most of their diet consists of grasses, berries, nuts, bugs, small creatures, and any carrion they find. They are able to extract as much protein from vegetation as the herbivores. Bears also crave sweets. Driven by a powerful sense of smell bears are drawn by the odors of human food. Once they get this food, they continue to seek it out, from backpacks, picnic tables, ice chests, and cars. Most conflicts between bears and people are linked to careless handling of food or garbage.

Do bears climb?

Black bears cannot jump very high being too bulky, but they are excellent climbers. They have 5 toes on each foot with 1 ½ in. sharp, curved claws on the front feet which allow them to climb trees well. They can climb a tree faster than you can fall out of it. They normally walk with a flat-footed shuffle at about 3 mph but they can run as fast as 30 mph using a rolling gallop if motivated.

Do bears hibernate?

Before they den up, bears gorge themselves to build up a fat bank of 3-5 inches to last them the winter. In the den, they become lethargic but they do not go into a deep sleep. Their breathing rate, heartbeat and temperature will decrease to lower their metabolism. This allows them to live off their fat reserves.

Is it dangerous to pet baby bears?

From birth until nearly 5 months, bear cubs are completely dependent on their mother. When they leave their den, usually in May, the mother teaches them the necessities of survival. It is at this period that she is extremely protective of her cubs and will defend them fiercely. The young bears will stay with the mother for the first two years of their life. It is not uncommon for bears to have twins or even triplets.

Do bears sleep in caves?

They do not sleep in caves or dens during most of the year but wander about their territory seeking dense cover for concealment or climbing a tree when they are sleepy. Depending on food resources, the female's home range is about 10 square miles while the male's can be up to 40 square miles.

Does standing erect signal an attack?

Bears are actually very nearsighted so they stand erect to improve their view and search the air for scents. This is not a sign of aggression. Once the bear identifies you, it may leave the area or try to intimidate you by charging to within a few feet before it withdraws.

Can problem bears be moved to another location?

With limited good bear habitat available, relocating a bear would just move them into another bear's territory.

Possessing excellent homing abilities, released bears have been documented traveling over 100 miles to return home. *Once a bear becomes a destructive nuisance, it usually has to be euthanized.*

Generally shy, the American Black bear usually avoids human contact, but they are also curious creatures and their behavior is often unpredictable.

You can report aggressive encounters with bears to the US Forest Service at 530-644-2324, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife at 530-225-2300 (Northern California) or you can report an incident online at <https://apps.wildlife.ca.gov/wir> . This information excerpted from Department of Fish and Game brochures and guides.