



Camino Real Ranger District Bear Aware program

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Warm-up

Today we are going to talk about bears. I want you all to take a look at this photo. This is a real photo. It's called: Uninvited black bears at a picnic, Jasper Park Lodge, ca. 1960s, Postcard, Grant-Mann Lithographics Ltd. Vancouver.

Are following statements true or false? (*Answers in italics*)

Raise your hand if you think it is true.

T F These bears have proper table manners.

False. They are going to make a big mess here.

T F Wild bears have interrupted someone's coffee break.

False, probably not, because these are black bears and they are shy. If there were people here, they probably wouldn't have come. Probably what happened is the food was left outside for an hour or two, and then the bears came.

T F Any food is good food to a bear.

True, they aren't picky.

T F People should be able to leave food outside without consequences.

False, leaving food outside is an invitation to bears.

T F If bears learn to associate the smell of humans with food, they will search for food in places where there are people.

True. They are shy, but food makes them a lot less shy.

(Activity taken from Whyte's museum in the Rockies)

We are going to play a guessing game.

Can anyone guess how many people have been killed by black bears in North America in the last 100 years? (Give hints, i.e. higher or lower)

About 50.

How many people is that a year?

That's one person every two years in the U.S. and Canada put together.

For every person killed by a black bear, how many do you think get killed by dogs?

45

By bee stings? 120

By lightning? 250

You have a greater chance of getting struck by lightning than getting killed by a bear.

These are all estimates but they give you the right idea.

(Statistics from the Wildlife Research Institute)

How many people in New Mexico have been killed by black bears?

One, last year near Mora.

How many people get mauled by black bears in New Mexico?

According to Game and Fish, on average about 2-3 people. Less than five.

What kind of bears do we have here?

Black bears.

What color are black bears?

It doesn't matter if it's red, orange, cinnamon or brown. It is still a black bear. Here we have some different Black Bear skins.

How many black bears are there in New Mexico?

New estimates say 6,000 – 8,000.

Black bears are usually shy. When things get scary, they run away. They prefer to avoid confrontation with people. But, at this time of year (September), they are very busy.

What are they doing? Eating. It's a feeding frenzy. They are in hyper-fat storing mode. They'll eat all day and all night, up to 20 hours a day. Some gorge themselves until they can't move. A guy at the Game and Fish Department said they had one 120 pound bear eat 70 pounds of dog food, in one sitting, gorging himself until he couldn't move. That's over half of his body weight.

How would you feel if you ate half of your body weight?

Very sick, you couldn't even eat that much.

What do bears eat? Right now, they eat mostly acorns. Here in New Mexico they eat chokecherries, raspberries, grass, fish, small mammals and whatever else they can get. Any picnic basket is a good picnic basket, to a bear. And that's where we begin to have problems.

Most problems with bears occur due to inappropriate actions by people.

Bear encounter scenarios

There are lots of things you can do to avoid confrontations with bears. We are going to act out some scenarios. Do you what a scenario is? It's like a skit, only I'm going to tell you what to do. In these scenarios, there are lots of things people do wrong with bears. I want you to watch and see what they are.

Assign roles to students and tell them where to stand.

Scenario 1: Six people

Two people together
One black bear
One more person
Trees

Two people are walking in the woods. They see a black bear up ahead on the path. She is turning over rocks looking for grubs (worms and bugs).

One person thinks this is a great opportunity. He/she wants his/her picture taken with the bear. He/she gets out some potato chips for the bear, approaches the bear and feeds it.

The other person comes up close and takes a photo.

Once the bear is done with the chips, he scampers off down the path.

Then he sees another person walking along.

What does he do? He thinks, "Where are my potato chips?" and starts following the person.

Discussion

What did people do wrong here?

Never sneak up on a bear. Surprised bears will react out of self-defense.

Never feed a bear. It is against the law in New Mexico. Bears are smart. They learn to associate people with food and then they lose their fear of people. That's when they become problem bears. A fed bear is a dead bear.

Never try to get close to a bear to take a picture

What is the right thing to do in this situation?

Never approach a bear. Wildlife photographers take pictures from safe observation areas. They use telephoto lenses that allow them to get a larger image

from a distance that does not frighten the animal. You can use binoculars and spotting scopes to view animals from a safe distance. (*camera with telephoto lenses, binoculars and spotting scope on display*)

If you see a bear on the path ahead of you, and the bear does not see you, back slowly away until you are out of sight of the bear. Detour around the bear and stay downwind so the bear does not smell you.

Watch the bear to see what it is doing.

You should hike in a group in bear country.

Hike only during daylight hours.

Scenario 2: Four people

Two people

One bear

One tree

Two people walking in the woods come within 15 feet of a black bear.

The bear is startled and stands on its hind legs for a minute, sniffing.

Then it starts clacking its teeth, and salivating, slapping the ground with its paws.

One person takes off their backpack and turns and runs. The bear runs after them and smacks them with its paw.

At the same time, the other person runs and climbs up a tree. The bear follows him/her up the tree.

What was the bear doing here? Was it about to attack?

No, it stood up to get a better view. The bear was trying to identify what the people were and then it gave them a warning.

What went wrong here?

They ran from the bear. Never move fast near wild animals. It triggers a chase reflex. They run faster than you. They can reach speeds of 30mph.

Don't climb a tree to escape a black bear. They climb trees much better than you.

You probably wouldn't even make it up the tree.

Keep your backpack on. It can provide some protection if a bear attacks.

What should you do here?

Stay calm. Keep looking at the bear, but not making eye contact (staring can be interpreted as a sign of aggression by the bear) while you slowly walk backward, talking quietly. Give the bear a chance to leave the area.

Make yourself look bigger. Raise your arms. Bring your jacket up over your head to make you look larger.

Stay in a tight group.

If the bear continues to approach you, throw rocks, sticks, or anything you can reach to try to stop the bear.

If the bear attacks, fight back

Scenario 3: Five people

Bear

One person

Trees

Chokecherry Bush

Bear tracks

Bear scat (*if you have it*)

A person is hiking quietly through the dense forest by a stream. The person doesn't notice all the bear tracks and bear scat around them. The person stops to pick berries in a shady area, coming face to face with a black bear. The bear takes a swat at his or her head. He or she is knocked over and plays dead.

What went wrong here?

The person was not making noise.

The person wasn't paying attention to their environment. They weren't looking for signs of bears.

The person was hiking alone in an area with low visibility by a stream, an area where you are likely to find bears.

While it's not wrong to pick berries, you have to be very careful in these areas.

The person played dead, which is not recommended for black bears. Playing dead is recommended if attacked by a grizzly bear. We don't have grizzly bears in New Mexico.

What would be right?

You should always fight back once a black bear has approached you in confrontational manner. Making noise, yell, throw rocks and sticks at the bear.

When hiking in bear country, you should always be alert and look for signs of bears.

You should hike in open areas and bring a friend and make noise. Let someone else know where you are going and when you plan to return.

Scenario 4: Living in Bear Country – six people

Woman

Man

Neighbor

Officer from the Department of Game and Fish

Bear
Apple tree

It is getting dark. The woman is cooking dinner on the barbecue in the backyard.
The man fills up some birdfeeders outside.
The woman puts a plastic garbage bag full of garbage outside.
The man puts a bowl of dog food outside.

Meanwhile, next door, a bear comes out of the forest to inspect the apples on the ground by the neighbor's tree. Their neighbor feeds it a piece of meat as the man and woman watch.

The barbecue is done so the man and woman go inside to eat dinner.

Then the bear comes into their yard. It knocks around the bird feeder and eats the seeds. It tears open the garbage bag, eats some of it and throws it around. It comes up and smells the barbecue and eats the dog food.

The man and woman look out the window and see the bear. They freak out.
The woman calls the Department of Game and Fish and complains about the bear.
The Game and Fish officer says she'll come and move the bear.
Game and Fish comes and sets a trap for the bear. It is caught and moved.

Is everything going to be okay for the bear now?

No.

It would be like if you were suddenly moved to Albuquerque. You have to learn where everything is. That takes time. And bears don't have time when they need to eat now. Also, they have probably been moved into another bear's territory – a bear that is probably bigger and stronger than they are. So they might get beat up. Often bears that are moved find their way back to where they were. If they come back too many times, they will be shot.

What went wrong?

The people were messy with their food – the birdfeeders, the dog food, the garbage and the smelly barbecue grill all could attract bears.

Their neighbor fed the bear. It is illegal to feed bears in New Mexico. They can be issued a citation and fine.

There were lots of apples left on the ground under the apple tree that would attract bears.

What could they do right?

Keep garbage and dog food inside.

Bring bird feeders inside for the night.

Ask their neighbor not to feed the bear, because it affects them too.

Pick up and remove fruit that dropped from the tree.

Electric fences can keep bears and other animals out of orchards, gardens, compost piles, and beehives.

It is illegal to feed bears. If one person feeds a bear in an area, then the bear begins to associate all people with food.

For a bear, any food is good food. A black bear can smell food a mile away.

Scenario 5: Camping in the Backcountry – Three people

A couple

One bear

One tree

They set up the tent. Then they build a campfire right beside the tent.

The man cooks a fish dinner. They eat dinner. He puts on cologne to cover up the smell of the fish, so he won't smell bad for his girlfriend.

They hang the food right near the tent.

Then they brush their teeth beside the tent and then go to bed.

A bear comes into their campsite and starts sniffing around. He tears down the food bag and eats some. Then he smells around the campfire and then attacks the tent on the man's side, pulling him out of the tent.

Why did the man get attacked and not the woman?

The man smelled like a nice fish dinner, because he went to bed in the clothes he cooked in. He also wore cologne. All smelly things can attract bears.

What went wrong here?

The campfire was too close to the tent. All food activity should take place 100 yards from the tent.

It is good to hang the food, but it needs to be 10 to 15 feet above ground and four feet out from the trunk of the tree it hangs on.

Never sleep in clothes you cook in.

Hang toothpaste, cosmetic items and toothbrushes with your food. Anything smelly. Don't wear perfume or cologne.

What should be done differently?

Keep your camp clean. All food activity should take place 100 yards from the tent.

Hang or put your clothes in a bear-proof container.

When car camping, put all your food in a bear resistant container or in your trunk.

Scenario 6: Four people

Two people
Dog
Bear

Two people are hiking in the woods with their dog off the leash. It goes off into the woods following the smell of a bear. It starts chasing the bear. The people call it, but it doesn't come. The bear gets cornered against a rock. The bear realizes it is only a dog, and starts chasing the dog. The dog runs back to the people, and the bear follows him.

What went wrong?

Dogs don't belong off leash in bear country.

What would be better?

Have the dog on a short leash or leave the dog at home.

So what was common to all of these scenarios?

People do things that attract bears, usually involving food. By being careful people can prevent most bear incidents.

Do Black Bears want to attack people?

No. All they want to do is eat. And they are not interested in eating people. So if we are careful with food, we can avoid bear problems before they even happen. Here is a coloring book (*hand out Be Bear Aware coloring book*). Make sure you read it really carefully, because we will have a bear quiz.

If there's time (Bear Museum with skulls, claws and footprints)

In North America, we also have are the grizzly bear, which is also called the brown bear. Its subspecies, the Kodiak, is the largest bear in the world.

Then there's the Polar Bear which is white and lives up north in the Arctic.

Now here we have the footprint of the black bear, the front foot of an adult and back foot of a young bear. Bears walk plantigrade, or flat-footed, the way people do.

Now here is a much bigger foot. This is a Kodiak bear.

This is a black bear skull and this is a Kodiak skull. Can you see the difference?

This is the biggest type of bear in the world. A male Kodiak can be over 10 feet tall on his hind legs and five feet tall on four legs. It can weigh up to 1,500 pounds. A Kodiak is found in the Kodiak Archipelago in Alaska.

We also have bear claws here -- the black bear, the grizzly and the Kodiak. The black bears claws are more curved for climbing trees. The Kodiak and the grizzly are stronger and sharper for catching fish and hunting.

There were once grizzly bears in New Mexico, but the last one was killed in 1931, so now there are only black bears.