

Bear Facts



About Bears

The coast redwood and Douglas-fir forests, and oak woodlands of Redwood National Park are home to many black bears (*Ursus americanus*). The black bear is the most common species of bear in North America, and is the only one found in California since the grizzly bear (*U. horribilis*) was exterminated in the 1920s.

Despite their name, black bears are not always black; they are often brown, blonde, or cinnamon colored. In the park, black bears are not much larger than humans. Adult males usually weigh less than 300 pounds (140 kg) and females weigh less than 175 pounds (80 kg). Despite their ungainly appearance, they can run at speeds up to 25

miles per hour (36 km/hr) for short distances. They also climb trees and swim with great agility. Unlike most other mammals, they see in color, but their eyesight is very poor compared to that of humans. To compensate, they have keen senses of smell and hearing.

Black bears are solitary except during the breeding season or when a female has cubs. Although black bears are most active in the early morning and evening, you might see one at any time of day.

Wild bears have a natural fear of people and avoid contact with us. If you are fortunate enough to see a bear in the park, it will probably be running away from you.

Natural Food Sources



Bear clawed tree

Black bears are classified as carnivores (meat eaters) - like coyotes, raccoons and mountain lions - but they are really omnivores, eating both plant and animal foods. In the spring, while other food is still scarce, they eat mainly grass and other plants. Sometimes they rip the bark off trees to eat the sweet cambium layer underneath. You may see these trees, with claw marks and shredded bark, along roads and trails. The bears also use their powerful, clawed front feet to tear apart rotting logs in search of ants, termites, and insect larvae. Berries ripen during summer and are a favorite food.



When fall comes, bears visit oak woodlands to gorge on acorns. Nuts and berries are very nutritious and fattening; a bear can gain up to three pounds a day eating them! Bears also eat dead animals they may find, and occasionally prey upon small mammals such as squirrels, rabbits, and fawns. Historically, salmon and steelhead were much more abundant and were an important food for bears in this area.



During winter months, food is too scarce to satisfy bear-sized appetites. Bears solve the problem of cold weather and food scarcity by hibernating. They construct dens in hollow logs, stumps, or caves, and then go to sleep. Their temperature drops several degrees and body functions such as respiration, heartbeat and digestion are reduced. In the redwood forest, bears usually remain in their dens from December to April, but they do occasionally wake up during this period.

Reproduction



Black bears can live longer than 20 years. Bears mate during the summer, and as many as three cubs, blind and without fur, are born in the winter den. Each newborn weighs about one half pound (1/4 kg). The mother bear teaches her cubs where to find food and how to fend for themselves. She dens with them the next winter, but soon after that she forces her offspring to seek a home-range, or territory, of their own.

Research

Park biologists began studying bear habitat use, diet, and home-ranges in the early 1980's. The information gathered provided a scientific basis for the development of a comprehensive bear management plan. The major goals of the plan are both to maintain a healthy bear population while allowing visitors opportunities to understand and appreciate them in their natural habitat, and to minimize the number of negative human-bear interactions.

Research has shown that bears have very good memories. When they learn to get human food in campgrounds and from garbage cans, they will return again and again. Bears are very strong and can easily tear open coolers, car doors, and windows when searching for food. In the process of seeking out additional human foods, they may lose their fear of people and become dangerous.

Relocating problem bears is not an effective solution at Redwood National Park. The long, narrow configuration of the park makes it impossible to relocate problem

bears far enough away to prevent them from returning to their original home range. Even the bears who do not return are seldom successful in the new location; relocated bears often continue to cause problems at the new site or they may be killed by bears that already live there. Relocation merely treats the symptom, not the cause of the problem.

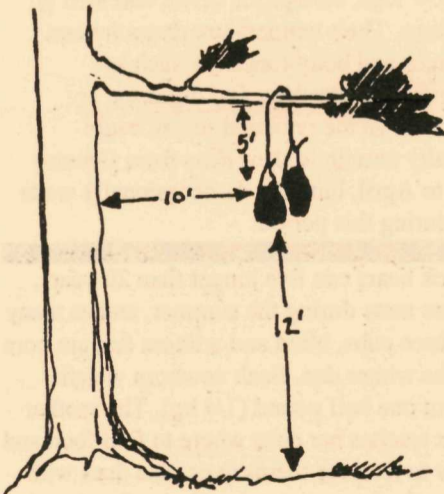
For these reasons, bears that cause serious property damage or threaten human safety unfortunately must be destroyed. Because most bear problems are a direct result of bears becoming habituated to human foods, the responsibility for keeping bears from acquiring a taste for human foods rests with **all of us. NEVER FEED BEARS OR LEAVE GARBAGE ACCESSIBLE TO THEM.** If you see people feeding bears, or a bear which appears aggressive or is loitering near garbage cans, **please report the incident to a Park Ranger immediately.**

Safety

The goal is to keep negative human-bear interactions to a minimum. By following these regulations you will reduce the likelihood of personal injury or property damage. Never feed bears or leave food unattended even for a few minutes.



Backcountry campers: If your campsite does not have bear-proof lockers, hang food and garbage (10 ft. out and 12 ft. up). Inquire at a visitor center for more information about the "counter-balance" method. Pack all garbage out with you. Cook and store food at least 100 ft. from where you will sleep. Wash dishes immediately after use.



Always use bear-proof garbage cans and food storage lockers when provided.



If a bear approaches: Stand up and wave your arms. Shout! Make loud noises! Throwing small rocks in the bear's direction will usually send it running. Be bold, but use good judgement. If you feel endangered, walk away, don't run.

Put food away immediately after eating. Always store food and scented personal care items in a secure place, like the trunk of your car.



If you see a bear, please fill out a wildlife observation card (available at trailheads and information centers). Biologists need your help to know where bears have been sighted and their behavior.

This allows park staff to identify where bear-proof lockers and garbage cans are needed, and to make sure visitors are informed about bears.