



BLACK BEARS

BIOLOGY

The black bear (*Ursus Americanus*, Fig. 1) is the smallest and most widely distributed of the North American bears. Adults typically weigh 100 to 400 pounds and measure from 4 to 6 feet from tip of nose to tail. Some adult males may attain weights of over 500 pounds.



Fig 1. Black Bear, *Ursus Americanus*

FOOD HABITS

Black Bears are omnivorous and feed on a wide range of both plants and animals. Their diet can include grasses, wood fiber, berries, nuts, acorns, tubers, insects, animals, carrion and garbage.

Food shortages occur in bear ranges when summer and fall mast crops (berries and nuts) are no longer available. During such periods, bears become bolder and travel more widely in their search for food. Human encounters with bears may be more frequent during such time periods, as are complaints of crop damage and livestock losses.

DAMAGE

Damage caused by black bears is quite diverse, ranging from trampling sweet corn

fields and tearing up turf to destroying beehives and killing livestock. Black bears are noted for nuisance problems such as scavenging in garbage cans, breaking in and demolishing the interiors of houses and garages. Bears will also raid campsites, food caches and sometimes maul people. Bears also become a nuisance when they forage in garbage dumps and landfills.

PROBLEM PREVENTION

Most urban bear problems can be solved by removing the available food source. This can be done in a number of ways.

NEVER FEED BEARS! Often people leave food out for bears so they can take pictures of them or show them to visiting friends. Doing this only conditions the bear to associate people and residences with a food source.

Pets should be fed during daylight hours and all pet food removed before darkness. All ripe and windfall fruit/vegetables should be picked daily. Food should never intentionally be left out for wild animals. In suburban areas where livestock such as lambs, piglets, calves, or poultry are raised and predation has been documented, precautions should be taken to prevent further losses. Animals can be brought into barns, sheds or enclosures at night to minimize losses.



The smell of garbage can attract bears from a long distance. Food scraps and other odor producing garbage should be sealed in plastic bags before being disposed of. Hauling garbage to the dump more often and using bear proof containers will reduce problems. Some homeowners or associations have built bear proof sheds to store the garbage in until it can be hauled away.

Small areas can be enclosed with an electric fence. The electric fence ribbon seems to work better for bears than the smooth wire. A ground apron will make it more effective.

When camping in bear habitat, food should be kept in a bear proof metal box or hung from trees a short distance from camp where it is not accessible to bears.

For further information regarding deterring bears from campsites, refer to the land managing agency, California Department of Fish & Game, or the camp director.

FRIGHTENING DEVICES

The use of frightening devices such as exploder cannons, barking dogs, fireworks, radios, and human effigies with recorders may provide temporary success in reducing problems, but over time, bears can become very tolerant of these methods. These methods should be used at the first signs of bear problems.

Before using audio repellants, consideration should be given as to the proximity of neighbors and the impacts of the audio repellents on those neighbors.

LAWS AND REGULATIONS

The black bear is classified as a generally protected mammal in California. Any bear that is encountered in the act of inflicting injury to, molesting or killing livestock or domestic animals can be taken immediately by the owner of the livestock or domestic animal, or the owner's employee providing, the taking is reported to the California Department of Fish and Game the following work day after the incident. Only individual animals causing damage to property, livestock or human health and safety can be

taken. The Department of Fish and Game may remove or take any bear or authorize an appropriate local agency with public safety responsibility to remove or take any bear that is perceived to be an imminent threat to public health or safety.

An individual is not guilty of a violation if it is demonstrated that, in taking or injuring a bear, the individual was acting in self-defense or in defense of others.

Any owner or tenant or agent suffering from damage/destruction to property by bears can apply to the California Department of Fish and Game for a revocable permit to take the offending bear.

For further information on the legal status of bears or assistance with a bear problem, contact your local California Department of Fish and Game office.

For additional information or assistance with the capture of a depredating bear, contact the USDA-APHIS-WS State Office (916-979-2675) or the USDA-APHIS-WS District Office for your area.