

News Release

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Yosemite black bears select minivan as “Car of the Year”

For a seven-year period, the top choice of vehicle by black bears in Yosemite National Park has been the minivan. The bears seem to base this decision on “fuel efficiency”—that is, which vehicle offers the best opportunity of finding a meal. As a result, black bears have shown a strong preference for breaking into minivans over other types of vehicles.

An article in the October 2009 issue of the *Journal of Mammalogy* examines the number of vehicles, by make and model, that black bears broke into from 2001 to 2007 in California’s Yosemite National Park. In all years, minivans had the largest or second largest number of break-ins by bears. When the number of break-ins was compared to the numbers of each type of vehicle visiting the park in 2004 – 2005, only minivans were broken into at a rate higher than expected based on their availability. The study explores possible reasons why the bears actively preferred minivans.

As humans and wildlife must increasingly coexist in closer proximity, animal populations will make use of anthropogenic resources, such as livestock, trash, and pet food. Black bears have been known to raid trash cans, break into houses and cars, and steal food from campers. In nature, black bears are selective in their foraging behavior. That same selectivity may apply when choosing from which vehicle to seek a meal.

The article offers four hypotheses about why Yosemite’s black bears are choosing the minivan: 1) Minivans are more likely to emit food odors, based on the fact that minivans are designed for families with children—who are more likely to spill food and drink in a vehicle. 2) Passengers of minivans are more prone to leave large amounts of food in a vehicle parked overnight. 3) Minivans may be structurally easier to break into than other types of vehicles. Bears most often gained access to minivans by popping open a rear side window. 4) A few individual bears could be responsible for all the break-ins, and they are displaying a learned behavior for choosing minivans.

Reports detailing 908 vehicles broken into by Yosemite black bears between 2001 and 2007 were reviewed. The rates of break-ins for nine categories included: minivan, 26 percent; sport-utility vehicle, 22.5 percent; small car, 17.1 percent; and sedan, 13.7 percent.

The full text of this article, “Selective Foraging for Anthropogenic Resources by Black Bears: Minivans in Yosemite National Park,” [*Journal of Mammalogy*, Vol. 90, No. 5, October 2009] is available at: <http://allenpress.com/system/files/pdfs/emails/2009/10/mamm-90-05-1041-1044.pdf>

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About the *Journal of Mammalogy*

The *Journal of Mammalogy*, the flagship publication of the American Society of Mammalogists, is produced six times per year. A highly respected scientific journal, it details the latest research in the science of mammalogy and was recently named one of the top 100 most influential journals of biology and medicine in the last century by the Special Libraries Association. For more information, visit <http://www.mammalogy.org>

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