

Be Bear Aware in Bear Country

The San Bernardino National Forest is home to a large black bear population (*Ursus americanus*).

There are many things we can do to avoid attracting bears. Good sanitation and awareness are key! By knowing how to recreate in bear country, we can prevent bears from being conditioned to being around people. Once conditioned, a bear is dangerous. It may approach people and come into camps and homes in search for food.

Black Bear Facts

- Bears are omnivorous. They eat plants and animals. Their natural diet, while primarily vegetarian can consist of: leaves, berries, nuts, grasses, roots, insects, fish, carrion and occasionally mammals such as deer.
- Bears are natural scavengers. They will remember an easy food source and can visit campgrounds in search of food.
- Bears have large, stout bodies with coarse black, brown, or cinnamon fur. White or pale patch on the throat or belly. No pronounced shoulder hump.
- Bears' sense of smell and hearing are far superior to humans and their eyesight is at least as good.
- Bears are fast. A bear can run 60% faster than the world's fastest sprinter.
- Bears are strong. They have been known to pry open car doors and windshields in search of food.

Avoid Attracting Bears

At Campgrounds and Picnic Areas

- Properly dispose of all garbage (including fruit rinds and cores), aluminum foil (even from grills) and plastic wrap that have been used to cook/store food.
- Properly contain strong smelling items (toothpaste, bug repellent, soap, etc) in bear-resistant or airtight containers. These canisters are made from a strong ABS polymer with smooth sides and rounded edges so bears have nothing to grip onto. Stainless-steel locks are easy for humans to open with a coin or screwdriver.
- Never leave food or coolers unattended (unless inside a vehicle or hard-sided camper).
- Do not cook or store food in or near your tent
- Wipe down table tops before vacating your site.
- Keep pets on lease, or close at hand.

While Hiking

- Let someone know where you are going and when you plan to return.
- Read all signs at the trailhead. Stay on the trail!
- Hike in a group, keep children close at hand.
- Make your presence known - wear a bear bell (call out).
- Avoid taking pets. They may attract bears.
- Watch for bear signs: scat, claw marks, diggings, logs or stumps torn apart, etc.

Bear Encounters

The primary concern is safety, both for the visitor and for the bear.

Although black bears rarely attack and generally avoid people, they are powerful animals and are capable of injuring or killing people. A bear can be very dangerous if provoked or conditioned to people. "Conditioned" means the bear is used to being around humans. A conditioned bear may associate people with food sources. This may turn a bear into a "problem animal" and will have to be dealt with aggressively; sometimes at the expense of its life.

These steps may be helpful if you encounter a bear.

- If you see a bear in the distance, make a wide detour or leave the area. Give a bear plenty of room to pass, and it usually will. Never surround or corner a bear.
- Do not feed or toss food to a bear, or any other wild animal.
- Pick up children or put them on your shoulders.
- Never approach bears - they are wild animals. If a bear changes its natural behavior because of your presence, you are too close!
- If a bear approaches you:
- Don't run-- back slowly away and make lots of noise.
- Face the bear, but don't look directly into its eyes.
- Keep it in sight.
- Make yourself look bigger by waving your arms and yelling.
- Make lots of noise and stomp your feet. Bang things together, throw rocks and sticks.

Remember, you can't outrun a black bear. They are extremely fast on the ground or climbing a tree. Warning signs of an attack include: a steady glare; ears laid back; smacking of the jaws and stomping of the front feet.

If the bear attacks, fight back with anything available. Act aggressively. Throwing rocks or hitting a bear with large sticks has been effective some cases. Playing dead is not appropriate.