

San Diego Natural History Museum

FIELD GUIDE

Living with Bears

Black bears are intelligent, adaptable animals that learn quickly. It is our job to understand bears to avoid conflicts. Black bear attacks are extremely rare. However, visiting or living near wild habitats has potential danger. Bears are very strong and can damage tents, cars, and other possessions.

A fed bear is a dead bear.

By making food available to a bear, we train it to associate humans with food. Once a bear learns this association, it will become a nuisance and often must be killed.

A bear will follow its nose.

Don't attract bears with food or garbage. Keep your camp clean. Store your food, pet food, and trash in bear-proof containers and away from your camp or in a secure building. Toiletries have interesting smells and can attract bears, too.

Don't try to touch or pet a bear!

No matter how cute and cuddly they look, bears are wild and powerful animals.

What if I see a black bear?

Consider yourself lucky, but keep your distance! When a bear stands, it is not threatening you, just surveying its surroundings.

- Don't run if a bear approaches you. Running may stimulate the bear's predatory instincts.
- Make lots of noise and throw objects at it to distract its attention.
- Make sure the bear has a clear way for retreat.



American Black Bear
Ursus americanus

- If the bear continues its approach, face it while slowly backing away.
- Keep your dog on a leash and away from bears.

If you are worried about a bear on your property or in your camp, don't shoot! Call the California Department of Fish and Game, a ranger, or 911 if there is an emergency.

Photograph: Tony Mercieca

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