

Bear Sense

By Don Kossick

The Nesslin Lake and Ness Creek area are in black bear country and while you're in the area, it's good to develop a respect for bears and a sense of how to conduct yourself in their territory.

The black bear - Ursus Americanus - is generally nocturnal and solitary. It is classed as a carnivore although most of its normal diet consists of vegetation such as twigs, buds, leaves, nuts, roots, various fruits and berries. They occasionally eat insects, mammals, birds, fish and carrion if the opportunity arises.

Bears have been described as the "four-legged garbage grinder" in reference to their renowned ability to steal food from campgrounds.



A special study was done recently on human and bear encounters which listed the following factors as danger points: the availability of unnatural foods within park areas which resulted in food conditioning and habituation of the bears; the lack of visitor education and information regarding basic bear biology and ethics of camping in bear country; and the availability of natural bear foods adjacent to areas of high human use.

Tom Anderson in the book Seasons of the Wild states, "ever since the black bear and a human met on this continent there has been a connection between the two animals. This connection is in danger of being eroded as we distance ourselves from the natural world. We must remind ourselves that partnership with, not domination of, black bears is needed for a healthy, diverse menu of life. Have we lost the respect we once had for the bear, for things wild?"

There is a way of living with black bears and practicing mutual avoidance and tolerance...

- Do not approach or feed a bear
- Avoid travelling alone in wilderness country
- Be careful near berry patches and heavy bush
- Never approach a freshly killed animal
- Keep children nearby and in sight
- Anticipate and avoid an encounter
- Carry a noisemaker (bell or whistle) and make your presence known by talking loudly, clapping, singing or occasionally calling out
- Watch for bear signs such as droppings, fresh tracks or their strong scent
- Odours attract bears. Reduce the source of odour from yourself, your tent and your campsite
- If you see a bear, leave the area immediately ... BUT move slowly. Do not run. Choose your escape route carefully and never get between a mother and her cubs
- Avoid direct eye contact with a bear. Eye contact is seen by the bear as a form of aggression
- If attacked don't run. If attack lasts more than a few seconds respond aggressively: use rocks, sticks, your fists or noise
- Bears want your food more than they want you, so don't leave your food in the open. Hang your food pack in a tree and keep all your scented stuff (deodorant, toothpaste, shampoo, etc) in the tree with your food pack or securely stored