

# BE BEAR SMART

Protect Yourself – Protect our Wildlife



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Protecting  
& Managing  
*our Future*

Manitoba   
*Building for the Future*



## LIVING AND VISITING IN BEAR COUNTRY

Because black bears are found throughout Manitoba, people who live, work and visit in wooded areas are encouraged to be *Bear Smart*. That means knowing how to avoid these large animals and how to react if you do encounter a bear.

 This brochure provides tips on how to safeguard yourself and your property.

## ABOUT BLACK BEARS

Although the coat colour is commonly black, it can be brown, cinnamon, blond or combinations of these colours. Black bears are intelligent, powerful, but shy animals preferring to avoid humans. They are superior climbers, strong swimmers and when running can reach speeds of 50 kilometers (30 miles) per hour.

Bears are always in search of food, motivated by sights, sounds, memories and particularly, odours. When bears find an easy source of food at a residence or campsite, they begin to associate this food source with people and dwellings. When bears discover that humans can be intimidated, they can get bold in acquiring this food.

Bears that learn to obtain food from residences or campsites become nuisances and the public demands their removal. Relocating or destroying bears does not resolve the problem if the food sources are not removed. Removing food sources from residences or campsites will deter bears from being attracted to these areas.



*Relocating or destroying bears does not resolve the problem unless the food sources are also removed.*

## THE BEAR FACTS

Here are some simple suggestions on how you can be *Bear Smart*:

- Never approach or crowd a bear – admire it from a safe distance.
- Never feed a bear, whether intentionally or inadvertently – it's unwise and unlawful if it creates a hazard to people and property.

Homeowners, cottagers and campers can discourage bears by handling food and garbage responsibly.



### Homeowners and cottagers

- Double bag garbage and place it in a bear-resistant container, secured building or fenced area.
- Clean garbage containers regularly with bleach or ammonia.
- Take garbage with you when you leave or ask a neighbour to put out your garbage just before pick-up.
- Don't burn garbage.
- Don't compost any food items.
- Remove all birdfeeders between April and November.
- Clean barbecues thoroughly after every use. Wrap in plastic and store indoors when not in use.
- Feed pets and keep their food dishes indoors.
- Pick all ripened fruit from fruit trees. Remove fallen fruit from the ground.
- Be aware that odours from cooking, baking and composting can attract bears.



### Campers

- Keep campsites clean.
- Store food and food-related items in airtight storage containers.
- Prepare all garbage for proper disposal.
- Use bear-proof refuse containers where provided.
- Don't cook, eat or store food in your tent.
- If you have a vehicle, store all food inside and out of sight.
- Cooking highly odorous foods such as bacon or fish could attract bears.
- Don't dispose of dish water around or near your tent.

**SAFE CAMPSITE**



**UNSAFE CAMPSITE**



## AVOID BEARS TO STAY SAFE

The best way to stay safe is to avoid all contact with bears. Try following these safety tips while in bear country:

- Learn about black bears, their behaviour and habitat.
- Stay alert and watch for bear signs like tracks, droppings and claw marks on trees.
- Don't obstruct your hearing by listening to music on headphones.
- When hiking, carry pepper spray and consider taking a walking stick, hunting knife and an air horn as deterrents if you encounter a bear.
- Always hike with a partner and let someone know where you will be.
- Stay in a group - don't allow anyone to straggle behind or rush ahead.
- Keep dogs on a leash as they may provoke an attack.
- Make your presence known by making noises, such as: talking, singing or wearing a bell.
- Do not wear cosmetics or scented hair or body fragrances.



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## If you see a bear

- Stop. Remain calm. Assess the situation.
- Do not turn and run as this may prompt a chase response.
- Do not climb a tree or enter water, as these options will not guarantee your safety.
- If a bear is in a tree, simply leave the area the way you came.
- If the bear is unaware of you, leave the area calmly and quietly when the bear is not looking in your direction.
- If you decide to take a detour, choose a wide path that will not intersect the bear if it is moving.
- If the bear becomes aware of you, calmly identify yourself as human by talking to it in a low voice while waving your arms slowly as you back away to increase your distance.
- Avoid direct eye contact.
- If the bear seems unconcerned, leave the area calmly and quietly.

## BEARS WILL DISPLAY THREE TYPES OF BEHAVIOUR. THESE TIPS WILL HELP YOU ASSESS THE SITUATION AND STAY SAFE.

### A Threatened Bear

A bear that feels threatened will often display signs of agitation and stress through vocal and/or visual cues such as huffing, popping of the jaws, pacing, swinging of the head or excessive salivation. This may escalate to slapping the ground or a tree, or to a bluff charge, stopping short of contact. The head will be lowered with ears drawn back while facing you. This behaviour is associated with defensive bears.



*A bear that feels threatened will often display signs of agitation and stress through vocal and/or visual cues.*

### If a threatened bear charges

- Stand your ground, be non-threatening.
- Talk to the bear in a calm voice.
- When the bear has moved off, proceed on your way.

### If a threatened bear makes contact with you

- Fall to the ground laying face down with legs slightly apart.
- Lock your fingers behind your head/neck.
- If the bear flips you over, roll back onto your stomach.
- Do not struggle or cry out.
- Do not move until you are sure the bear has left.
- If the attack lasts more than several minutes, the bear is not attacking defensively anymore. Fight back using a hunting knife, rocks, sticks or any other available weapon.

### A Non-threatening Bear

If a bear approaches in a non-threatening manner, it may be curious, used to people, after your food, wanting right of way, or to assert dominance.

#### If a non-threatening bear approaches you

- Stop and remain calm. Talk to the bear in a firm voice. Assess the situation.
- Do not turn and run unless reaching safety is a guarantee.
- Group together.
- Pull out your deterrent.
- Stand your ground until the bear leaves the area.

### A Stalking Bear

A stalking bear's approach will be deliberate and silent. This bear is the type you should be most concerned with. The head will be up and ears erect, displaying no signs of stress. This behaviour is associated with offensive bears.



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### If a stalking bear continues to follow you

- Stop and stand your ground.
- Make direct eye contact.
- Act aggressively to persuade the bear you are not easy prey.
- Shout, wave your arms, stomp your feet.
- Elevate yourself onto a log or rock and raise your jacket to look bigger.
- If within range, use your pepper spray.

### If a stalking bear attacks you

- Fight back with anything at hand. Use your walking stick, hunting knife, firearm, rocks, sticks, binoculars, car keys or even bare hands.
- Strike for the bear's eyes or nose.
- Kick and yell.
- Be relentless, you are fighting for your life.



## **BEAR ATTACKS ARE EXTREMELY RARE**

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Since 1900, there have been 58 fatal black bear attacks in North America with stalking, offensive attacks being more frequent than threatened, defensive attacks. In spite of thousands of encounters between people and bears, there have only been three black bear-inflicted deaths in Manitoba. All have been the result of stalking, offensive attacks.

## **THANK YOU FOR BEING BEAR SMART**

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Manitoba has a healthy black bear population and we are committed to ensure that bears remain part of our rich heritage and landscape. By working together, and being *Bear Smart*, we can safeguard people and property and reduce the number of problem bears.

If you are having a problem with bears, contact your nearest Manitoba Conservation office. For more bear information visit [gov.manitoba.ca/blackbear](http://gov.manitoba.ca/blackbear) or call **1-800-214-6497**.



*By working together, we  
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Handle bear spray carefully and use it as a weapon of last resort. Because of wind conditions, your state of mind or other circumstances of attack, you may not be able to hit the bear in the eyes, mouth or nose. When choosing a bear spray, you should look for a quality product that dispenses the contents in a cloud rather than a narrow stream. If you carry a spray, attach a full canister in a holster onto your belt or outer clothing and become familiar with its use. This will require that you practise discharging a can downwind in an area away from people. The cost of the rehearsal will be money well spent.

### Protect our natural wildlife heritage

Black bears are part of our heritage. Manitoba has a healthy black bear population, and we need to ensure that it remains that way. To co-exist in harmony with bears, we must remember that the bear is a wild animal and we must do our part to minimize the chances of an undesirable bear encounter.

The saddest aspect of human interaction with black bears is the fact that hundreds of bears die each year, because of it. Black bears that become used to eating foods associated with humans usually develop into problem animals and must be either relocated or destroyed. Relocation is often unsuccessful because a bear takes its learned bad habits and applies them in the area where it was relocated or it dies in the territory of another bear. Often it returns to the original area and resumes its nuisance behaviour. Destruction becomes the only alternative when a bear becomes habituated and food-conditioned. People can reduce this consequence by removing all attractants and by handling food and garbage responsibly.

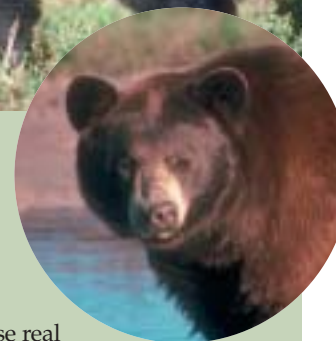
For details, please refer to our “*Removing the Attractant, Removes the Bear*” handout.

If bears make the place where you live or spend your vacation unsafe, contact your nearest Manitoba Conservation office for assistance. Telephone numbers are listed in *The Cottager’s Handbook* or Manitoba’s *Hunting Guide*. In an emergency, call the local RCMP office. If you are forced to kill a bear to defend yourself or your property, you are required to report the killing to a Natural Resource officer within 10 days.

For additional information, please visit our website at [www.gov.mb.ca/blackbear](http://www.gov.mb.ca/blackbear).

# BLACK BEAR ENCOUNTERS

## What to do



**B**lack bears are found throughout Manitoba. Their fur coats can sometimes be various shades of brown, cinnamon, blond or any combination of these. They are fascinating animals but can pose real danger to people. In dealing with black bears, caution, care and respect are *always* an absolute rule.

A bear’s behaviour and the territory it covers are largely influenced by its continual search for food. Black bears are naturally inquisitive and normally timid, preferring to avoid humans. With repeated exposure to humans at close range and without negative consequence, bears can learn to tolerate people at these distances and become habituated. Bears that are both habituated and food-conditioned are the most likely to be a problem, and may, on occasion, become aggressive. It is our responsibility as guests in bear country to be cautious and to help keep bears from becoming a nuisance or a danger.

If confronted by a bear, you may have only seconds to make some important decisions. A little knowledge can help you decide what to do. This is important in avoiding a tragic outcome.

### BE AWARE IN BEAR COUNTRY

Because bear encounters can be complex, there is no 100 per cent certain way to ensure your safety. The following are only suggestions that may fit the situation you may be faced with while in bear country.

To be safe, **AVOID ALL CONTACT** with bears.

- Learn about black bears, their habits, behaviour, food selection and habitat use.
- Stay alert, and be aware of your surroundings. Watch for bear signs like tracks, droppings, turned-up stumps and claw marks in trees. If possible,

stay in the open and avoid bear-activity areas, such as travel corridors along waterways and especially berry patches and carcass remains.

- While walking in bear country, take a walking stick, an air-horn, and carry pepper spray attached to your belt.
- Don’t hike alone. Travel with a friend or, at the very least, tell someone where you will be.
- Never let children straggle behind or rush ahead.
- Dogs can serve as an early-warning system for the presence of bears but should be kept on a leash at all times. If an unrestrained dog confronts a bear, the bear may follow the dog back to its owner.
- Make your presence known by any means available to you – wave your arms slowly, sing, clap your hands, talk in a calm voice. Don’t whistle, as it may resemble an animal’s call and could attract a bear from afar.
- Do not use a headphone device – walkmans, CD-players.
- Do not use scented hair or body products.
- Backwood users must keep campsites clean. They should store food and unwashed utensils in airtight storage containers to minimize odours and pack all remaining garbage for proper disposal. Only if necessary, burn (in approved facilities where fires are allowed) garbage, sanitary materials, cooking grease and food scraps rather than burying them. **Become aware of local fire restrictions.**
- Avoid carrying and/or cooking highly odorous food (canned fish, bacon, etc.).
- Place food, the clothing you cooked in and any synthetic-based odours (perfumes, deodorants, toothpaste) out of the reach of a bear, not in your tent. Suspend these items at least four meters (15 feet) off the ground in between two trees and well away from your campsite. If you are camping in or by a vehicle, store all food, cooking clothes and garbage inside the vehicle.
- Do not dispose of dishwater around or near your tent.

### If you see a bear...

Each encounter is unique. There is no guarantee that what works in one instance will work in another. In the collective opinion of experts, the following are recommended:

- Stop, remain calm and try to assess the situation.
- **NEVER approach or crowd** a bear.



- If a bear is in a tree, leave it alone by vacating the area. When it feels safe, it will climb down and leave.
- **Never feed a bear!**
- **Never run** unless reaching safety is a guarantee. If you are near a building or car, get inside. Fleeing may trigger a chase response. With a burst speed of 50 kilometres/hour (30 miles per hour), a bear can outrun any human and most cyclists.
- Climbing a tree or entering water is not a guarantee of safety, since black bears are superior climbers and strong swimmers.

### If a bear seems *unaware* of you...

- Move away quietly when the bear is not looking toward you. Keep your eye on the bear, but do not make direct eye contact because it may be interpreted as a challenge.

### If a bear is *aware* of you...

- Let it know you are human. Talk to the bear in a low tone of voice and wave your arms slowly while moving away upwind, if practical, to give the bear your scent.
- A bear standing on its hind legs is seldom getting ready to attack. It is only trying to get a better look or smell.

## IF A BEAR APPROACHES YOU...

A black bear will react to humans in one of two ways:

**Offensive manner** – the bear either wants right-of-way, to assert dominance, or it may be stalking you as possible prey

**Defensive manner** – a bear sees you as a threat to it, its cubs, or its food

### Offensive Situations

If a bear has not been approached and is not stressed, you should interpret any silent advance as offensive. The bear's head will be up and ears erect.

- A first response should be to give the bear right-of-way by moving aside and watching the bear.
- If it continues to follow you, you may try dropping your pack and food, then slowly move away while keeping an eye on the bear.

### Reacting to a offensive situation

- If the bear ignores your pack or food and continues to follow you: **Stop and stand your ground.** If you are with others, stay closely together and act as a group.
- Make sure the bear has a clear escape route.
- Act aggressively to persuade the bear you are not easy prey.
- Stare it in the eye.
- Raise your jacket to look bigger.
- Shout. Wave your arms. Stomp your feet.
- Stand on a log or rock.
- Slowly move uphill from it.
- Use an air-horn if available.
- Use your bear spray if within range.
- Use your firearm if you have one.
- If the bear attacks silently, **fight back** with anything at hand.
- Use your walking stick or grab a rock.
- Use a stout piece of wood or knife.
- Strike for the nose or eyes.
- Kick, yell, be ruthless.

### YOU ARE FIGHTING FOR YOUR LIFE.

### Defensive Situations

A bear may run or it may defend itself by acting aggressively. These bears usually become stressed, often giving visual and vocal cues:

- swatting or slamming it's paw against the ground
- blowing explosively through its nostrils
- exhaling loudly, huffing and moaning
- jaw-popping (snapping its teeth)
- lowering the head with ears drawn back while facing you
- excessive salivation

The situation may escalate to an actual charge, but it is most often a bluff where the bear stops and veers away before making contact.

### Reacting to a defensive approach or charge

- **Stand your ground.**
- When the bear has stopped its advance, slowly back away, watching the bear through the corner of your eye and talking to it in a calm, low voice.
- If you haven't already done so, prepare your deterrent such as bear spray, knife or firearm, if you have it.
- If the bear attacks, **fall to the ground** immediately upon contact.
- Lay on your stomach with your legs spread slightly apart, locking your fingers behind your head. If the bear flips you over, roll back on your stomach to protect your vital organs and face.
- Do not struggle or cry out.
- When the attack is broken off, do not move or make a sound until you are sure the bear has left. If you do, the bear may resume the attack because it still feels threatened.

## Black Bear attacks are rare

Despite many bear-human encounters, bear attacks are infrequent, and cases of bear-inflicted deaths are even more rare. Stephen Herrero, author of *Bear Attacks: Their Causes and Avoidance*, has documented 54 fatal maulings in North America between 1900 and 2003. Over half the fatalities have occurred since 1980, including eight this century. In most cases, people were preyed upon by offensive bears living in rural or remote areas. The bears were not likely exposed to people, food or garbage. Some were campground or garbage bears, that had become progressively less fearful of humans and decided to kill. In Manitoba, there are only two records of a black bear causing a human fatality, despite thousands of encounters between people and bears.

It's unlikely the victims did anything, deliberately or inadvertently, to trigger the attacks. The victim may just have been in the wrong place at the wrong time.

## Commercial bear repellent

Under *Canada's Criminal Code*, repellent sprays that use the natural ingredient *Capsaicin* (a derivative of cayenne pepper) are prohibited unless used to protect yourself against an animal attack.

Capsicum spray should never be a substitute for practising bear awareness and safety. The spray is no guarantee against injury from black bear attacks, but it can often act as a limited deterrent with limited range. Under typical conditions, range is good up to six to seven metres (20 feet), but is most effective at three to four metres (15 feet). The spray can be somewhat effective in repelling black bears in remote areas, but is less effective against bears strongly conditioned to human foods and garbage.



Both approaches are extremely rare with **offensive** attacks being more frequent than **defensive** attacks.

## HOUSEHOLD WASTE MANAGEMENT:

1. Do not store food or garbage in old refrigerators or freezers. Store in airtight or bear-proof refuse containers.
2. Store garbage cans in a secure place such as a garage or a bear-proof shed, not by the house. Use plastic bags inside garbage cans to help hide odours. Grease, fat, bacon and other meats should be disposed of in sealed containers.
3. Clean garbage cans and other refuse containers frequently with diluted ammonia, bleach or Lysol mixtures. Place camphor disks in garbage cans to mask food odours. Mothballs, air fresheners, Lysol and ammonia-soaked rags may also work.
4. Rinse all containers before disposing and recycling.
5. Turn off kitchen exhaust fans that have vents to the outside when they're not in use. Make sure the vent screen is cleaned regularly.
6. Clean the outside end of your drain if you do not have a holding tank to contain flushed food particles in dishwasher.
7. Do not leave dirty diapers or diaper pails outside.



**For additional information on bear proofing, electric fencing and what to do when you encounter a bear, visit our Web site at [www.gov.mb.ca/blackbear](http://www.gov.mb.ca/blackbear)**

If bears make the place where you live or spend your vacation unsafe, contact your nearest Manitoba Conservation office for assistance.

**Your local Manitoba Conservation District office telephone number is:**

In an emergency, call the local RCMP office.

**Your local RCMP telephone number is:**

If you are forced to kill a bear to defend yourself or your property, you are required to report the killing to a Natural Resource officer within 10 days.

## REMOVING THE ATTRACTANT REMOVES THE BEARS

### BE "BEAR SMART" – KEEP SAFE IN BEAR COUNTRY

**B**lack bears have big appetites and their behaviour is driven by their search for food. The most effective way to avoid unwanted black bears is to practise prevention. Once a black bear gets used to eating food associated with humans, it usually becomes a problem animal that has to be relocated or destroyed.

Items or odours that attract bears are called attractants. If you are having problems with black bears, you can play an important role in discouraging a bear from becoming a problem or a danger by removing what attracts bears.

The best way to avoid bear problems is not to attract them in the first place.

Please be aware:

- Manitoba Conservation does not condone the feeding of wildlife, especially bears.
- Natural Resource Officers may order any person to stop placing attractants or remove attractants they have already placed, if the attractant could cause a risk for people or animals. Failing to comply with an order issued by a Natural Resource Officer is an offence under The Wildlife Act.

If you are having problems with bears, following these tips can help make your location less attractive to bears.

## GENERAL ATTRACTANTS:

**BARBECUES** – If not maintained properly, barbecues can attract bears. Replace lava rocks with ceramic bricks for easier cleaning. Remove grease cans from gas and charcoal grills after every use. Turn the grill on "high" for several minutes to burn off food residue and grease. Clean barbecue pits and grills thoroughly with an ammonia-based cleaner to mask the smells before leaving them outside. When not in use, wrap barbecues in plastic and store them inside a secured garage or shed.

**BIRDFEED** – Remove all bird feeders from April through November. Birds have ample natural food in the summer and do not need to be fed. When food is scarce, bears will choose bird food over natural food. In cottage country, bird feeding accounts for over one third of all bear nuisance problems. Do not leave any food out to attract wildlife.

**BURNING** – **Do not burn garbage.** The remains of the fire may attract bears.

**COMPOSTING** – Do not compost unless you can be certain the location is away from tree cover and will not act as an attractant. If composting plant matter, make sure you practise hot composting. Do not compost meat, fish, fruit, vegetable, grease, oil, or dairy products outdoors. If you must do it, consider indoor worm composting. For details see [www.mastercomposter.com](http://www.mastercomposter.com).

**FRUIT TREES** – Fruit-bearing trees (such as apples, plums, cherries, oaks) are a natural attractant, especially in the early fall. Bears will travel great distances to feed on fruit trees. If you do not want bears feeding on your property, consider removing all fruit trees and replacing them with native, non-fruit-bearing trees. Pick all ripened fruit off trees and off the ground each morning and evening.

**GARDENS** – Avoid planting vegetable gardens. If you still wish to have a garden, fruit trees, beehives or orchard, install a proper electric fence. Remove vegetables as they mature and do not use blood meal or fish-based products to fertilize your lawn or garden. Keep your lawn mowed and weeded. Grass and dandelions in flower may attract bears.

**ODOURS** – With the exception of ammonia, Lysol, camphor and other such strong smells, everything smells like potential food to a bear, including the aromas from cooking, baking or composting.

**PET FOOD** – Do not feed family pets outside. An empty dish left outside will have the leftovers and the scent of food. Store animal food indoors in airtight containers.

## CAMPSITE MAINTENANCE:

1. Keep your campsite clean and put everything away.
2. Do not cook, eat or store food in your tent. Do not burn food scraps or fat in an open fire.
3. If you have a vehicle, keep all food stored and out of view in the vehicle.
4. Backwoods users should store food and unwashed utensils in airtight storage containers to minimize odours.
5. Suspend food and clothing that smells of cooking out of the reach of a bear, at least four meters (15 feet) off the ground in between two trees and well away from your campsite.
6. Do not dispose of dishwater around or near your campsite.
7. Do not use cosmetics with strong fragrances and do not keep products like perfumes, deodorants or toothpaste in your tent.