How to live in harmony with bears

Although encountering a wild bear can be a magical experience, helping bears maintain a healthy fear of humans is key to keeping both people and bears safe.

Relocation does not work,
so we must learn to coexist.

Communicate through body language

- Black bears may huff, stomp, or sometimes bluff charge when they feel threatened or afraid
- Give them an **escape route** away from you, other people, or busy roads
- **Be the bigger bear -** assert your dominance!
  - Don't act afraid or submissive
  - If one comes near your home or campsite, stand your ground!
  - Yell aggressively, stomp, wield a stick, and use noisemakers (though Tahoe bears are largely immune to pots and pans!)
  - Throw small objects like pinecones or use a paintball gun as physical reinforcement, but avoid their faces and cubs
- If a bear you are hazing climbs a tree to escape, allow them ample time and space to come down before continuing – though they may remain in the tree for several hours!

Respect

- *Never* approach or pursue a bear, even for a photo op
- Drive slowly and **watch for wildlife** – cubs often lag behind their mothers
- Keep dogs leashed – a leashed dog can deter bears, but a loose dog may provoke a bear, putting the dog in danger
- Avoid hazing a bear who's feeding; he may respond defensively and unpredictably

Remember that black bears are generally docile. It is in their nature to escape up a tree rather than face danger head-on.

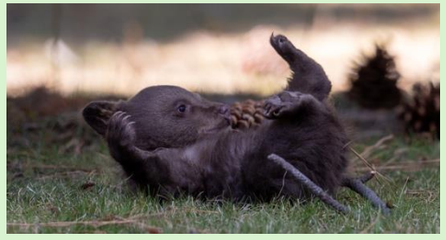
However, the lure of high-calorie food in human areas can sometimes lead them to take risks.

We must communicate a clear, consistent message: the reward is not worth the risk!

Protect your den and food cache

Never feed bears!

- Lock your car - windows up, no food or trash inside, or you may return to find your car's interior destroyed!
- Use bear-proof garbage enclosures to dispose of all trash, and ensure the latch is secured
- Keep your home's windows and doors closed and locked when away or asleep
- If you're away from home for a while, remove stove knobs and consider shutting off your water – exploring bears can turn appliances on
- **Remove attractants** like birdfeeders, pest poisons (e.g., d-Con), fruit or nut trees, toiletries, pet food, alcohol, spices, ice cream, and more
- Place bowls or tupperwares of industrial-strength ammonia just inside any doors and windows or in cars, as this can help mask the smell of any attractants
- Burn all residual food from BBQ griddle after each use, and clean grease pan
- **Install electric deterrent systems** – contact us for recommended techs
- Store food and toiletries in bear bins when camping



In the Woods

- Use your voice to make your presence known as you walk
- If you see a bear, keep calm and give him space, do not approach
- Pick up small children and keep dogs on leash
- Bears that have previously been fed may approach humans – use hazing techniques outlined in "Communicate through body language"
- Appreciate the experience!

Hibernation in Tahoe

- We estimate that at least 80% of Tahoe's bears hibernate
- It's not true hibernation, but *torpor* - bears may briefly leave the den to eat snow or enjoy the sunshine
- Hibernation is driven by a lack of natural winter foods, but access to human foods keeps some bears awake
- All cubs are born in January or February and remain in the den with their mother until Spring
- The dry, cozy space beneath our homes acts as an ideal den site. To prevent costly damage, secure crawl space entrances as tightly as your front door or install an electrical deterrent. Remember: if the head fits, the body fits!

Black bears live to eat – and are fast learners. If they find easy meals in trash or kitchens, they'll return.

But if we **defend our "dens"** with intelligence and resolve, they'll move on.
Comfort around people can get a bear trapped and killed.
Help break the cycle.

Black bear facts

- Investigative, opportunistic omnivores – they eat anything and everything!
- The American Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*) is currently the only bear species in California or Nevada
- Adults can weigh 200-600 lbs or more
- Fur comes in all shades - cream to cinnamon to jet black
- Can be active day or night
- Cubs stay with their mother for their first 18 months
- Memory like an elephant's
- Sense of smell is 2,100 times stronger than ours!
- Bears are excellent climbers, swimmers, and can run more than 30mph

Knowledge over fear

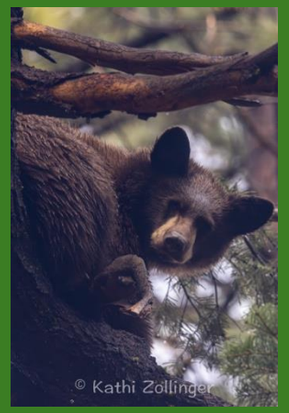
Black bears are often confused with their larger, more aggressive relative, the brown or grizzly bear. But because the two species evolved together, black bears learned that survival meant yielding to the stronger animal. Their instinct is still to avoid conflict and flee rather than fight.

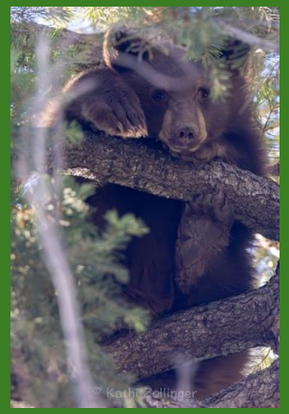
Tahoe's bears would rather escape than stand their ground, which means we can act as the dominant species. Even housecats and chihuahuas regularly scare black bears off their property!

No black bear has ever killed a human in the Tahoe Basin, despite constant human-bear interactions. We are far more likely to be killed by a neighbor's dog or a mosquito. They are by far the safest bear species in the world to live alongside.

Though classified as predators, about 95% of a black bear's diet consists of plants, berries, nuts and insects. They're more likely to extract nuts from pinecones than try to hunt a rabbit - or go for the ice cream in your freezer than the bacon!

The BEAR League is a nonprofit organization helping people to coexist with black bears in the Tahoe Basin and beyond. Respect-based education is the cornerstone of our mission.





Please call us with questions or a bear emergency! When needed, our dedicated team of volunteers will assist in person.

SaveBears.org

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Welcome to BEAR COUNTRY

Living in harmony with Tahoe's black bears