



Spring 2026

Another Winter Into Spring

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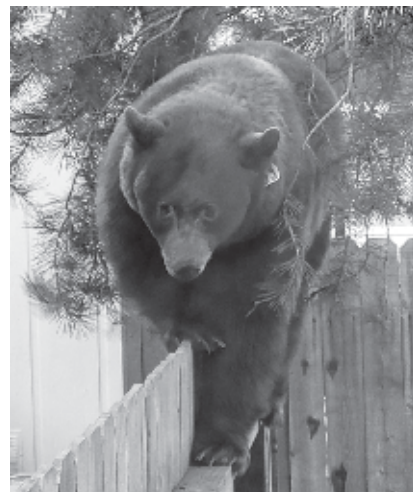
It's Spring and the only bears here at Tahoe who aren't out and about are the Mamas with the new little cubs who were just born in January. We have cameras on two of these families and you can find many clips of adorable footage on our Facebook page www.facebook.com/SaveTahoeBears



"Vee" photo by Kathi Zollinger

Let's step backwards for a winter report now because we'd like to share one interesting fact: As always, beginning in November, countless calls come in from residents asking for our help because they think a bear is hibernating under their house. Each year the number of calls like this increases – people just can't imagine this will happen to them so they don't secure their crawl space openings. There are many days when our various BEAR League Responders crawl under 5 to 10 homes to see what's going on. It's only once been a raccoon – and that was years ago – the rest of the time it's a bear. Sometimes a single bear, sometimes a Mama with her yearling cubs, sometimes a Mama about to give birth and sometimes a Mama with newborns. And here's the takeaway: Of all these

bears we came face-to-face while crawling on our bellies in the darkness among the spiders and scurrying mice, there was only one we didn't yet know. All the rest we immediately recognized. That one bear who was initially a 'stranger' quickly became our friend because she attempted to den under several more houses and was finally allowed to stay for a month and a half so she could, at last, get some sleep. The point of this report is the proof it provides that the BEAR League personally knows 99% of the bears all around Tahoe. And yes, they all have names, and this is just fine with us.



"Hope" photo by Kathi Zollinger



"Collin" a bear we know very well.
photo by Kathi Zollinger



Pathway to Coexistence

by Devon Barone, Executive Assistant / Bear Coexistence Coordinator

This past fall gave me two meaningful opportunities to represent the BEAR League among fellow coexistence professionals, and to be inspired by their passion, professionalism, and forward thinking.

In September, our partners at Oakland Zoo hosted a “Coexistence Summit” in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Representatives from organizations around the world gathered to share their work helping communities coexist with their native wildlife – from chimps in Uganda and snow leopards in Tibet and Nepal, to wolves in the Sierras, coyotes in the Presidio of San Francisco and of course the bears at Lake Tahoe. In an intimate gathering of just twelve empathetic, intelligent, kind, like-minded people, we were able to truly connect over our shared mission and its complications and challenges and exchange the creative solutions we each bring to our work.

October brought the International Human-Bear Conflict Workshop in Kalispell, Montana – a much larger gathering of a few hundred professionals from across global bear country, including India, Ecuador, Spain, Albania, and throughout North America. Participants ranged from Fish & Wildlife and other government employees from around the country, to nonprofits and activists like us working to protect bears from the consequences of human behavior.

The theme of the conference was “Changing the Narrative around Human-Bear Conflicts.” Many speakers emphasized the need to move away from default lethal responses and instead address the true root of conflict: human behav-

ior. Several presenters, including Fish & Wildlife representatives, spoke about the importance of shifting the language we use — placing responsibility where it belongs and focusing on how communities can prevent problems before they begin.

In that sense, the BEAR League fits naturally into the conversation. Our presentation focused on the community-based approach we’ve practiced in Tahoe for decades: working directly with residents, helping people understand bear behavior, and treating bears as part of the community rather than outsiders to it.

Hearing similar ideas emerging from bear professionals around the world was incredibly encouraging. It feels as though the field is beginning to move in the direction we have been going in since our founding. I’m glad to see others finally recognizing that lethal methods of conflict mitigation do not work.

After the conference, I was fortunate to take advantage of the location and visit Glacier National Park, a years-long dream of mine. The astounding majesty of its mountains and their intricate, colorful geology, valleys gilded with yellow aspens and birch, and the year’s first dusting of snow felt like gifts from Mother Nature. Even more so did the magic of encountering four different bears in fewer days – a grizzly, a lone black bear, and a black bear mother with her cub. These gifts reminded me that this work we do, helping to heal the strained relationship between our species and the rest of nature, is the right path. 🐻



From the Bear Den



“The Solution is Respect”

by Ann Bryant

As long as the BEAR League has been in existence one of the most haunting and seemingly unsolvable quests is reaching our goal for *People Living in Harmony with Bears...*perhaps better known as ‘co-existence.’ This has been our undeniable mission for 30 years. We continue to strive for what some believe is unobtainable. But, after all this time, we finally have a clearer understanding of just what the probable barriers likely are that thwart our well-intentioned but elusive success.

Simply put, we are convinced it’s the unflinching determined insistence of the state wildlife agencies not to budge on their pervasive undercurrent of disrespect for bears as living, breathing, thinking, individual beings. This is evident in all that they say and do...and write and teach...and in every law, protocol, policy and procedure they bring forth. Bears are not considered worthy of compassion. If an adult bear is injured it is illegal to give him medical aid. The only legal options are to let him suffer or ‘euthanize’ him, and tragically, a whole lot of both of those choices happen regularly on their watch. It’s also severely frowned upon when cub rehabilitation facilities try to give orphans in their care ‘names.’ The caretakers are ordered to give them a number; impersonal and hard to memorize. BEAR League is constantly ridiculed and harassed when we refer to local Tahoe bears by the names that neighborhood residents give them. A caller to our hotline tells us, “I just saw Rudy run across the street and I think a car might have clipped him, he’s now limping.” Without names we wouldn’t know which bear we need to monitor for a possible injury.

Without names it would go like, “A bear just got clipped by a car, and he is dark brown and medium sized with a possible white chest blaze” which describes several bears in the area. Rudy has no idea whatsoever that people call him that name, he’s not bothered by it all, he just knows he’s a bear who is either looking for something to eat...or taking a nap. The state wildlife agencies claim that it’s disrespectful to name bears. What a joke! (They know full-well that it’s harder to hunt, kill and make a rug out of someone with a name, to put it bluntly. And there I go again...expressing my anti-trophy hunter Bear Hugger-ness.)

These folks are also terribly upset about our Cub-Cams for the last several winters. For those of you who don’t know, when an unsecured crawl space has been breached by an expectant Mother Bear, but no one knows until the cubs start crying, BEAR League is called and we help the homeowner get thru the next three or four months as the cubs grow enough to emerge in the spring. We set up custom designed and non-invasive camera apparatus so we can monitor the bear family and the utilities under the house and thereby do our best to keep the bears safe, and the gas lines etc. out of danger of exploding. We get amazing footage of the tiny newborns and their devoted Mothers, as the cubs rapidly grow and their Mamas tenderly nurse and care for them with every bit as much love as any human Mother has ever shown for her helpless precious baby. We realized really quick this would be a great educational tool to show people all around the world what secretly happens during the first days of a tiny

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bear cub...and his Mother in the natal den. So, we post video clips of the activity on Facebook and Instagram. Thousands of people from all around the globe are totally smitten by these images. The comments are usually about what amazing Mothers the bears are, how precious the babies are, that their cries sound exactly like a human infant calling "Mama, Mom, Ma ma ma!" and often, people say "How can anyone hunt bears?! That should be illegal!! I'll never hunt again!!"

You get why the agencies who promote hunting, are horrified by our CubCams?

Promoting respect would seriously help resolve the bear-human conflict issues but these folks aren't interested in this obvious solution. Instead bears continue to be demonized, indiscriminately killed, labeled as dangerous, considered disposable, exploited for profit, left to suffer and on and on and on. Because to give them the respect they so richly deserve would, at long last, allow human beings to wake up and demand a world where all life has value and humans aren't the only creatures who have God-given rights to live in Peace. 🐻

"Of all the special things we choose to do for our planet, let one of them to be of service to animals.."

- Paul Oxtan

BEARS' PERSONAL THANK YOU FOR THE DINNER PARTY



A snapshot from the Treat-A-Bear-To-Dinner Party

The Bears want you to know they had a Toga-rific time! The Roman/Greek menu was delicious and everyone was surprised the 'Blues Brother Bears Band' appeared on stage. What a high-energy evening!

The Bears had a toga-tally fun time and they would like to thank all those who treated them for dinner.

"Animals are part of every landscape, part of the symphony of interactions that create an ecosystem..."

- Kristin Ohlsen

Show Your Support by Wearing some Swag!

Help us spread the message by proudly wearing one of our logo caps or sweatshirts — available on our website. Visit SaveBears.org/Merchandise or point your phone's camera at this QR code and tap the link that pops up to explore our shop and show your love for Tahoe's bears.



Social Media - The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly

by Julie Mason, Advisory Board Member and First Responder Volunteer

Before I joined BEAR League and knew nothing about bears, although I never wished them harm, I was terrified of them. Looking back, I think the public was made to fear them. It seems fear was promoted more than education in understanding these highly intelligent animals and learning their language.

I am part of the team to help BEAR League manage social media. I speak on behalf of the bears and help educate the public, responding by educational content and fact while encouraging the understanding of black bear behavior.

Whenever I see a post that demonizes black bears, I correct them. For example:

Post: "I was just attacked by this bear who ran at me right in front of my house. It's aggressive and dangerous!"

My response: "You weren't attacked by this bear. If you were attacked, you would be dead. This is called a bluff charge. This is not a sign of aggression, instead it is the bear's way of communicating to you that you are too close and they are afraid of you. They are asking you to respect their space and to please back off. A bluff charge is not a sign of aggression, it's the bear's way of communicating to you."

Then, bring on the trolls! Even though 'trolls' can be jerks, they too serve a purpose. I do my best to politely shut them down and use the opportunity to correct any false and distorted ideas they may have. Although I might not be able to change their minds, I still use the opportunity to enlighten others who may be reading the same post. For example, a transaction to a post titled "Black Bears are not 'mean' by nature":

Troll: "This post is irresponsible! No doubt it was pretty traumatic for that jogger who was attacked by a bear recently. How can you post something about bears not being mean?! You are a danger to the public!"

My response: "In no way is this post encouraging people to go up and hug a bear. As a matter of fact, it's just the opposite. The purpose of this post is for people to learn a bit of bear language. In response to "the jogger who was attacked recently": First of all, the jogger stated that he did not see the bear. I was not there so I can only speculate, but it is obvious to me that the mama bear felt threatened and felt the man was running *at* them – which would be interpreted by a bear as aggression. Please imagine for a moment if you were in a dark alley holding your child and a deranged man started running at you out of nowhere – please imagine that for a moment because this is the same feeling for that bear. So this bear was triggered into complete defense mode. I'm hopeful that if the jogger was aware a bear was there, he would have handled the situation differently. He would have stopped, made his presence known, got eye contact, backed off and gave the bear space. As you know, you should never approach a bear and certainly never run towards a bear because that would be interpreted as *threatening* to a bear. It is an unfortunate situation for everyone involved. It is unfortunate the jogger got hurt and it is unfortunate that this bear is now going to be killed for simply doing what she thought was defending herself and her cub from a 'deranged' man running at them."

People who cite "Anthropomorphism" are the worst. In my opinion, this word should be removed from the dictionary. It pushes false "scientific"



Thoughts From the President



“Eco-Grief, Eco-Depression”

by Ali Van Zee

These aren't just buzz words. The emotional pain wildlife advocates have faced, increasingly over the last decade, hasn't been taken seriously and it's having a real effect on the conservation movement. And it's not just anecdotal. A 2023 study in Conservation Biology interviewed more than 2000 conservation professionals and found that almost 30% suffered from moderate to severe distress. It's not hard to see why: we suffer because the natural world is suffering!

When your whole “raison d’etre” is inextricably tied to the well-being and protection of a species (or all species) and you see them losing their lives due to human actions, it causes a lot of emotional suffering. Wildlife populations have plummeted by a staggering 70% from 1970-2000 according to WWF. That's an enormous number in just 30 years! And the leading driver is humans. Whether from over-fishing (think Chinese mega trawlers), hunting/poaching, or the increasingly warming planet, wildlife is struggling to survive.

And who's going to care and pick up the battle to save our natural world when we're gone? Conservation has always been generational work. Those of us working in this field must have faith that younger generations will take up the fight. But that “hope” for the future is getting harder to come by ... and that only increases the stress on those of us who care about the well-being of the planet or our favorite species.

Another factor is money. Or the lack of it. So many organizations are vying for what seems to be a limited pool of funds. Donations are critical to organizations working hard to protect wildlife and the planet. They pay staff salaries and expenses for things like educational materials such as posters, brochures or, in our case, our electric bear mat program. All key to helping people learn to coexist while keeping themselves and wildlife safe. Having to constantly worry about finances to keep themselves and the mission going adds a huge amount of stress.

It's not just women who suffer from this overwhelming stress. Men working in conservation, especially overseas where there are stigmas surrounding mental health, are at greater risk for suicide. That tracks with research done by the (former) CDC that found that men are four times more likely to die from suicide than women.

Sure, working in conflict zones like the Congo can take a toll on your emotional (and physical) health, but so can working in Lake Tahoe where there's an endless supply of careless, clueless humans. Despite 30 years of messaging, many people still don't get that it's important to secure trash, doors, windows and crawl spaces so bears aren't lured into trouble. Some people lure bears on purpose! Then, we have government agencies who should be protecting wildlife but are overrun by hunters who enjoy killing animals and cannot/will not understand


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Thoughts from the President - continued from previous page

those of us trying to save them. They “coddle” even those homeowners who refuse to mitigate conflict and issue depredation permits to kill “offending” bears. We personally know all the individual bears in the Tahoe Basin. When one is killed - by accident or on purpose - the grief is profound. Reaction by agencies (and their hangers-on) to our grief can range from callous indifference to outright scorn.

It all takes a huge toll. Sometimes it feels like an insurmountable toll.

There’s no easy “cure” for eco-grief. Some conservation professionals just walk away. But most of us are trying to hang in there and stick around despite the toll this work takes on our physical and mental health. We revel in our friendships - both human and animal - and squeeze every drop of happiness out of a beautiful day or meaningful encounter. We remind ourselves that while we can’t solve all the issues facing wildlife, our work has purpose and can, and often does, make a big difference. 

Social Media - continued from page 5

propaganda and provides disconnect between humans and animals. It intentionally minimizes the animal’s value and/or intelligence and denies the fact that they are living sentient beings. Whenever I am challenged by someone who cites Anthropomorphism, my response is simply this quote from Jane Goodall:

“You cannot share your life with a dog or a cat and not know perfectly well that animals have personalities and minds and feelings.”

Thankfully, I find most people in this world are animal lovers and represent The Good. There are only a few who represent The Bad and The Ugly.



“Shame on such a morality that fails to recognize the eternal essence that exists in every living thing and shines forth with inscrutable significance from all eyes that see the sun.”

-Arthur Schopenhauer

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Renewal Time

Included in your newsletter is an invitation to renew your membership with the BEAR League. As most of you are aware, we send this out once a year, with the spring newsletter. If your dues are already current—many renew in the fall—there will be four * (asterisks) after your name on the outer envelope. In every newsletter we include a renewal/new member/donation form. This is to share with friends or use instead of the colored form. It can be a bit confusing so if you're not sure if your dues are current just email us and we'll let you know. We only ask our members to renew once a year, not each time we send out the newsletter, but many send donations here and there and that's fine too.

Thank You for being here with us *for the bears*. In more ways than you realize, you are the ones who keep our organization going. We appreciate you immensely.

"It's not enough to love animals; we must actively protect and preserve them. It's our duty and responsibility as custodians of this planet."

-Daphne Sheldrick

**If you are already a member & have paid your annual dues,
why not share this membership offer with a friend?**

Just cut along the line and mail to address below.

Name _____ Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

New Member

Renewal

Donation

Please indicate the annual membership category you wish to support:

_____ \$35 Bear Cub

_____ \$500 Kodiak Bear

_____ \$60 Polar Bear

_____ \$1000 Grizzly Bear

_____ \$100 Cinnamon Bear

_____ \$2000 and above Spirit Bear

_____ \$250 Black Bear

The BEAR League needs your support -- Thank You!

We do NOT share our members names with anyone!

501c.3 tax exempt organization. Your donations are tax deductible. EIN 68-0468708

email Ann Bryant: bearsnsquirrels@sbcglobal.net

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“What’s Wrong, Little Bear?”

Early this past November a distraught resident in South Lake Tahoe called us just after daybreak telling us a young bear was in the wooded area right by her house and she thought he was dying...the coyotes were circling and he could not move to defend himself. We immediately called Scott, our ‘morning-person’ Volunteer Responder who lived nearby. Scott rushed to the scene and found the 75-pound cub unable to stand up and apparently incoherent but trying to lift his head occasionally.

Scott ran the coyotes away and took some footage of the cub so we could share it with our veterinarian, Dr. Staci Baker. Soon Dr. Baker and Volunteer Responder, Kathi, arrived and searched the area for clues as to what could be the problem. They found a bag of half-eaten dog food and a torn up Chewy box nearby. We wondered if there had also been medication in the box that he might have ingested. We reached the residents whose name was on the torn box, and they said there was only dog food. We also realized he was very near a Marijuana dispensary, and we thought perhaps he had found some pot or gummies in the trash and had consumed a large amount.

We called our liaison at CDFW, described what we saw and knew, gave our opinions and a warden was dispatched and arrived a couple of hours later. By now the cub was starting to rally a bit so there was hope for him to survive whatever it was that was doing this. We also knew him as the cub who had been orphaned two months prior but had been doing well on his own so the DFW and BEAR League agreed he should remain free rather than be rescued and taken in for rehab. But now this!

The warden made a few calls and informed his supervisors and the DFW veterinarian of the details and it was determined he should be taken to our good friends at Gold Country Wildlife Rescue in Auburn where he would be safe and immediately receive medical attention in their clinic. Scott picked the cub up and carried him in his arms, across the wooded area to the awaiting cage in the warden's truck, and off they went to Auburn where our friends were waiting.

We kept in close contact with them as he began to vastly improve and soon we all knew he was going to be just fine. Blood tests revealed nothing abnormal, but the blood was not drawn for several days so whatever might have been in his system had left no trace by then.

He was christened 'Chevy' because, prior to his captivity, he had a habit of crawling into the trash receptacle at the Chevron station in town and had been featured on a ‘Dodo’ video, seen all around the world.

We are now awaiting news from our friends at Gold Country as to when Chevy will be released. This is the time of year when all the cubs they care for are given their freedom. There were six bear cubs already in their care when BEAR League and CDFW rescued Chevy and we all had hoped he would make friends with the others, but he was not interested being the late-arriving new kid, and he just went it alone. But he's 100% wild and totally back to normal and will soon be out in the wilderness living life to the fullest. We hope he stays away from gas stations, cannabis shops and Chewy boxes... as well as cars and people.

