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Issue #41

## My First Season with the Bears

I recently retired so my husband and I moved permanently into our second home at Tahoe. I've always wanted to volunteer after retirement but was uncertain with what organization. Did I want to walk rescued dogs, cuddle and play with rescued cats, what? When Hank the Tank hit the news last winter, I followed this story intently along with the rest of the world. I was impressed by the commitment BEAR League had for this bear as well as their commitment to the entire community. Volunteering for a wild-life rescue had never crossed my mind until then.

I signed up, attended BEAR League's training course, and studied black bear behavior as much as I could. Soon I was sent out on my first bear call which was a bear who had been injured in a vehicle collision. As we worked to determine the extent of

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*Princess*



her injuries, I and two other volunteers kept the bear safely off the roadway and out of sight of the cars passing by, so I was with her for almost three days. I will tell you; this was the most profound experience of my life. The bear, whom I called Princess, and I were able to communicate with our hearts through our eyes. I let her know that I was there to help and care for her and in return, she told me she was very grateful and felt comforted. She showed absolutely no signs of aggression or fear. She allowed me to remove debris from her head and face and let me tenderly smooth her fur. I can't express how blessed I feel to have experienced such a connection with this peaceful and gentle being, all language barriers removed while sitting peacefully together watching the morning sunrise. Although I've responded to many other bear calls since then, I will never forget my first. My sweet Princess, I will always love you and you will be in my heart forever.

*Julie Mason  
Proud BEAR League volunteer*



*photo by Kathi Zollinger*

# Studying Tahoe Bears Using GIS Software

Starting this spring as another season begins, the BEAR League will be gathering data from each of the thousands and thousands of bear related phone calls we answer. We have purchased and set up an ArcGIS software program that Scott Bye, a Board Member and part of the SLT Response Team, has taken an intensive training class to understand how to program the data and gather the results, and will be managing the data. Scott will work with the office staff and several other volunteers to pull statistics and insight from the information we input that should give us the ability to see trends and details that would otherwise remain unnoticed or hidden. We hope to be able to share our insights with Policy Managers so they can make good management decisions around the basin that will be better for homeowners and, of course, the bears. We are striving to be able to share some of our findings by the fall, with an interactive "story" that our readers will be able to see on our website. We plan to continue this study for several years. It promises to be super interesting and the sky's the limit on what we expect to learn. Can't wait to give you our first report. 🐻

"Bears are not companions of men,  
but children of God."

*Charles Muir*

"The nicest people in the world are the ones  
who love animals."

*P. A. Bryant*



# From the Bear Den



*Winter Bears...by Ann Bryant*

Tahoe's bears are beginning to emerge from their winter's nap...also known as: hibernation, torpor, den cycle or just simply 'sleeping in'. We've heard from a lot of people who wish they were bears so they could do this, without feeling guilty or lazy...haha.

Each year BEAR League receives more and more calls about bears who have decided to spend the season under a house or a cabin. Usually, the access door leading to the crawl space or basement has been left open or unsecured, or the door is too flimsy to thwart a big strong bear who is seriously in the market for some winter digs. If we get the call early enough in the season, it's not a big deal to encourage the bear to find a more suitable spot---if not for him, for the homeowner. But as winter gets more intense, we feel terrible about forcing the bears out from their cozy, comfortable, safe dens and into the snowy cold harshness. Sometimes the homeowner realizes they have damage to one of their utilities, so they call to have it repaired and the technician crawls under the house and comes face to face with a bear. Needless to say, that dude invariably makes a speedy exit...and then we get a panicked call.

When homeowners realize there is a bear sleeping under their house and they call us for help, it is astonishing how varied their attitudes are. Some are convinced it's the end of the world and life as they knew it is over. They scream, hyperventilate and rant to the point where it's difficult to get the address so we can send one of our Bear Team members over to help. They are positive the sleeping bear intends to claw through the floorboards, force his way up into their living room

and eat them as they sit on the couch watching TV. (They have obviously watched too many scary movies.)



*Cartoon illustration by Lucinda Sayre*

Most callers aren't quite that bad but they just can't come to grips with having a bear, who refuses to pay rent, take up residence in their basement---it's just too farfetched and ridiculous for them to imagine. We go take a look, calm them down, and, if there is no damage and the bear can't do anything, some of these folks actually agree to let the sleeping bear lie.

The ones we relate to and like most are those who hear noises---big noises---coming from underneath the house and they immediately feel protective. Before they give us their address they make us promise we will not hurt 'their bear'. We assure them we don't ever hurt any bears. Sometimes they have damage to the utilities, but they just want to make sure the bear is OK. Sometimes they have no heat in parts of the house but insist they can live with that minor inconvenience. Sometimes they tell us the bear snores really loudly from his nest under their bedroom

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and it wakes them up at night, but they find it 'comforting' and go right back to sleep, smiling, content in knowing they have a bear sleeping close by.

This past year set several records. There were more bears under homes than ever before, there were more people who willingly allowed the bears to stay than previously did, and there were far more Mama Bears who gave birth under houses or decks than we've ever witnessed. Hmmm, wonder if this means the bears are seriously into 'co-existing'... or are they just taking back what has always been theirs, buildings be damned? Who knows, but it does seem to be a growing trend. And, like we have said at least four hundred million times, "If you don't want a bear to take up residence under your house, Secure Your Crawl Space". One resident who discovered he had unexpected tenants living beneath his living room—a family of three bears—told us he saw our warning in the news last fall about securing crawl spaces but thought to himself, "I've been here 14 years and it's never happened yet" so he ignored it. To us, that's like someone thinking since they have never been hit by a bus, it should be ok to walk out in front of one. The big difference here is that the bus will probably kill you, pretty good chance the bears won't. 🐻



If I can stop one heart from breaking,  
I shall not live in vain;  
If I can ease one life the aching,  
Or cool one pain,  
Or help one fainting robin  
Unto his nest again,  
I shall not live in vain.

--- Emily Dickinson, 1830

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"Bears, it turns out, are a lot like humans. They form alliances with strangers, they make calculations about relative costs and benefits, they lay down rules and punish those who break them. They trade based on a clear system of reciprocity. They communicate using equal parts emotion, intention and dependence on context--- a combination that is essential for communication between strangers and in fact forms the basis for language."

--- Benjamin Kilham

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"The Gypsies believe the bear to be a brother to man because he has the same body beneath his hide, because he drinks beer, because he enjoys music and because he likes to dance."

--- Ernest Hemingway

# Secrets of Living in Harmony with Bears

*Invitation to View Dr. Stephen Stringham's Recent Webinar*

*(Note: BEAR League prefers never to refer to bears as 'it' or 'its'.. please note that this writing is in Steve's words, not ours and not edited by us.)*

Imagine having a grizzly bear cub invite you to play. Should you accept or decline? That depends on how much you would relish being its chew toy. Although playful bears usually restrain their bites, restraint can be forgotten when they become excited – as I learned all too well when I wrestled with captive cubs.

In this webinar, over 200 beautiful images of grizzly/brown and black bears, plus several video clips, recall highlights of my life with bears, as I researched their behavior in the wilds of Alaska, and as I fought to protect them from human impacts.

This webinar explains how a bear's body language can reveal its mood and intentions. Reading its body language can help you choose the best response during a close encounter. Should you try to appease the bear and enhance its trust; or intimidate it to intensify its respect; or blast the bear with pepper spray or a bullet? Learning to communicate with bears is just one of my secrets, revealed here, for living in harmony with bears.

Cubs have invited me to play. Mothers have sought me out as a deterrent against other bears and wolves when the mother and cubs nursed or napped, and when the mother left her cubs with me for babysitting while she fished for salmon up to a few hundred yards away.

What happens when an adolescent male bear tries to kill and eat a cub whose mother is off fishing? Is the cub doomed? Or can it protect itself until its mother comes to the rescue? How does a mother defend her cubs against a male larger and faster and stronger than she is – a male that might want to eat her and her cubs? Watch and find out. What happens to someone

who stumbles on a bear eating a sea lion, a whale, a moose, or another large prey? Does the person end up as dessert? Here you can see what happened to me when I stumbled on the giant blackie "Black Brugo" as he was eating a smaller bear.

When bear cubs are orphaned, are they doomed to death unless someone rescues them? And if they are raised, should they be kept captive with minimal contact with humans until mature enough to be released, to avoid habituating them to people? That might sound good on paper, but releasing naive cubs forces them to learn all their survival skills on their own before they starve or are killed by another bear or a wolf. This could force them to seek food from humans. Alternately, should orphans be taken into the wilds frequently so that they can learn to fend for themselves?

As you can see here, I tried the latter approach with three orphans that were never captured. They visited me and slept in my cabin on their own schedule. They also allowed me to walk with them in the wilds, helping them learn to cope with other bears, as well as with lynx, wolves, raptors and human beings. I also mentored them in learning which plants to eat, and how to catch salmon and other prey. You will also see how two eagles responded when three cubs climbed a tree in which the eagles had a nest with nestlings.

It's all here: grand adventure, quiet humor, and a host of novel insights about bears.

*Stephen F. Stringham, PhD*

*Director - Bear Viewing Association*

*Bear Communication & Coexistence Research Program*

*39200 Alma Ave, Soldotna, AK 99669*

*907/260-9059*

*[www.bear-viewing-in-alaska.info](http://www.bear-viewing-in-alaska.info)*

*Facebook: Bear Viewing Association*

*YouTube: Secrets of Living in Harmony with Bears*



# Thoughts From the President



by Ali Van Zee

What a winter! I think everyone across this country - and the world - has experienced some kind of unusual anomaly in the weather this year. Where I live, at sea level directly on the coast, we even got over an inch of snow and the Pacific Range here right behind us (highest pass is only 1900' feet) got up to 18" and more. Tahoe is, of course, buried!

Perhaps this historically cold, wet winter has given more of you than just me time to think about bears and their wild friends and what more we can do to protect them. With outrageous, expanded hunts in New Jersey and other states (including a proposal to raise the personal limit right here in California to 2 bears) it got me thinking about how much our wildlife is still in danger.

State agencies and our Federal agencies like the USFWS, Interior and USDA and their subgroups like the Forest Service are driven by 18th Century settler mentality. They might not officially call bears, wolves and coyotes, etc "vermin" anymore, but their actions belie deep-seated irrational beliefs and fears and prove that's how they think of them. Plus, they are lobbied constantly, and have cozy relationships with NRA-funded hunter groups and Big Ag/Big Dairy - and these groups drive management decisions. Not science, not the roughly 85%+ of all Americans who don't want these horrid hunts. Hunters, ranchers and farmers. (And, I'm talking about those ranchers who graze on federal lands

on the cheap and refuse to initiate even basic non-lethal predator control.)

We sign petitions and write letters or make the call to our Member of Congress or Governor, but still, we are ignored. Animal welfare and other pro wildlife groups (like BEAR League!) will show up at State Wildlife Commission hearings but are ignored there, too. Why? Because these Commissioners have personal relationships and a special conviviality with the hunters who show up - in far greater numbers. If we're lucky, we'll get maybe 50-100 people for a big state hearing and we have had some success (banning hound hunting in California for bears and bobcats). But these days, less than a handful show up to local meetings on a regular basis, if at all. Hunters do, though. They are well-coordinated, and they show up.

Activism for wildlife can no longer be the work of the few. We have to get loud - and proud! We need to get out there. There has to be a way we can do this. We can't just come together for a specific incidence; we have to be out there all the time. We need to start striking up our own relationships locally, statewide and nationally. Why can't our voices have the reach hunter and Big Ag voices do? Both Big Ag and Big Dairy have almost unlimited funding and the NRA ensures all the hunter groups get big money, too. We're outmatched from the start. But, that shouldn't stop us! We've got the numbers.

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I probably need a few more of these wintry days to figure it out. In the meantime, if you're renewing your membership with the form attached, first of all, thank you! ...and, drop me a note with your ideas. I have every faith that those of you who are kind enough to support the work we do for bears and wildlife in the greater Tahoe Basin can come up with something.



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## Tip for Today



**Get a Bear Box if you haven't already.**

**Bear magnets like the one pictured above are available for free at several locations throughout Tahoe.**

**Put one on your bear box and remind others to...**

## Be Good to the Bears

“One day the absurdity of the almost universal human belief in the slavery of other animals will be palpable. We shall then have discovered our souls and become worthier of sharing the planet with them.”

--- Martin Luther King, Jr

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# Renewal Time

Every year in March or April we send out renewal invitations along with your spring newsletter. This is the only time our members are asked to renew their dues. Many of you send your dues in at the end of the year instead, and this is fine, too. And several members send a monthly donation, which is much appreciated as well.

Sometimes it can get confusing to our members as to whether you are current or need to send in your dues. Look at your mailing label on the envelope by your name... if you see four asterisks after your name you are current and do not need to mail in your renewal dues.

We include a Membership Form on the back page of every newsletter for those who wish to renew that way, or for our members to share with friends. If ever you have any questions about your membership status, please don't hesitate to reach out to our office for answers. Email or call us anytime.

And Thank You Again, for continuing to support the BEAR League... and, especially, the Bears.

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**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.*

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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*

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email Ann Bryant: [bearsnsquirrels@sbcglobal.net](mailto:bearsnsquirrels@sbcglobal.net)  
Facebook: [www.facebook.com/SaveTahoeBears](http://www.facebook.com/SaveTahoeBears)

[www.savebears.org](http://www.savebears.org)

P.O. Box 393, Homewood, CA 96141

(530) 525-PAWS (7297)

