

Big South Fork

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Big South Fork
National River & Recreation Area



Black Bears on the Cumberland Plateau

Historically, black bears were found throughout the Cumberland Plateau. However, due to human activity black bears were all but eliminated from their historic range. In the mid-1990s, 14 black bears were released in remote locations within Big South Fork NRRRA. While not all bears remained, many did, establishing a population in the park and surrounding area. Today, adults and cubs are frequently seen throughout the park.

Black Bear Diet and Reproduction

Bears are opportunistic feeders and will eat what is easily and readily available. Their primary foods are berries, nuts, acorns, fruits, grasses, insects and occasionally meat or carrion.

Adult black bears in the Big South Fork area weigh between 75-250 pounds. They vary in height when standing on their rear legs, but will rarely reach six feet tall. They are reclusive and prefer to be alone except during breeding season or when they have cubs. Breeding takes place during the summer. Cubs are born in the den during the following winter and are helpless for the first three months.

The female does not become pregnant until her body has gained enough weight to sustain her and the newborn cubs through the winter. If the female is under stress or fails to gain sufficient body weight, the mother may reabsorb the embryos. The gestation period lasts for six weeks.

If You Encounter a Bear

Black bears are secretive and shy creatures. Naturally, they have no desire to interact with people and instinctively avoid humans. In the event you see a bear in the backcountry, do not become alarmed. If the animal is foraging for natural food, simply stand as still and quiet as possible, and take advantage of a rare opportunity. Do not approach the bear, and do not let the bear approach you.

If your presence causes the bear to change its behavior (stops feeding, changes direction of travel, etc.) you are too close. Being too close may promote aggressive behavior from the bear such as running toward you, making loud noises, or swatting the ground. The bear is demanding more space. Don't run, but slowly back away, watching the bear. Increase the distance between you and the bear. The bear will likely do the same.

However, if a bear persistently follows or approaches you, without vocalizing, or paw swatting, change your direction. If the bear continues to follow you, stand your ground. If the

Did you know?

- An adult black bear has a top speed of 35 miles per hour over short distances.
- With the exception of the polar bear, all bears can climb trees.
- Black bears are only found in North America. The species ranges from Canada in the north to Mexico in

the south, and lives predominantly in forests.

- Despite their name, black bears are not always black – they can also be light brown, blond or even grey-blue.
- Approximately 75 percent of a black bears diet is vegetation. The remainder comes from bird eggs, fish, small mammals, and carrion. They do not go after large prey very often.

bear gets closer, talk loudly or shout at it. Act aggressively to intimidate the bear.

Act together as a group if you have companions. Make yourselves look as large as possible (for example, move to higher ground). Throw non-food objects such as rocks at the bear. Use a deterrent such as bear spray, or a stout stick. Don't run and don't turn away from the bear. Don't leave food for the bear; this encourages further problems.

If, however, the bear comes into your campsite, take a different approach. Any loud noise will most likely run the bear off, clanging pots and pans together, blowing a horn, and yelling and making yourself look larger would be appropriate actions.

Do not provide the bear an opportunity to get your food. Should the bear become aggressive, or if it does not depart after your attempts to scare it away, leave the area and report the incident to a park service employee immediately. If after hours, call the Resource Protection Hotline at: (423) 569-7301.

Black bears have a keen sense of smell and in most cases will smell you long before you ever see them and will leave the area. If you are horseback riding, generally the noise of the horses will scare the bear away long before it is ever seen.

Food Storage

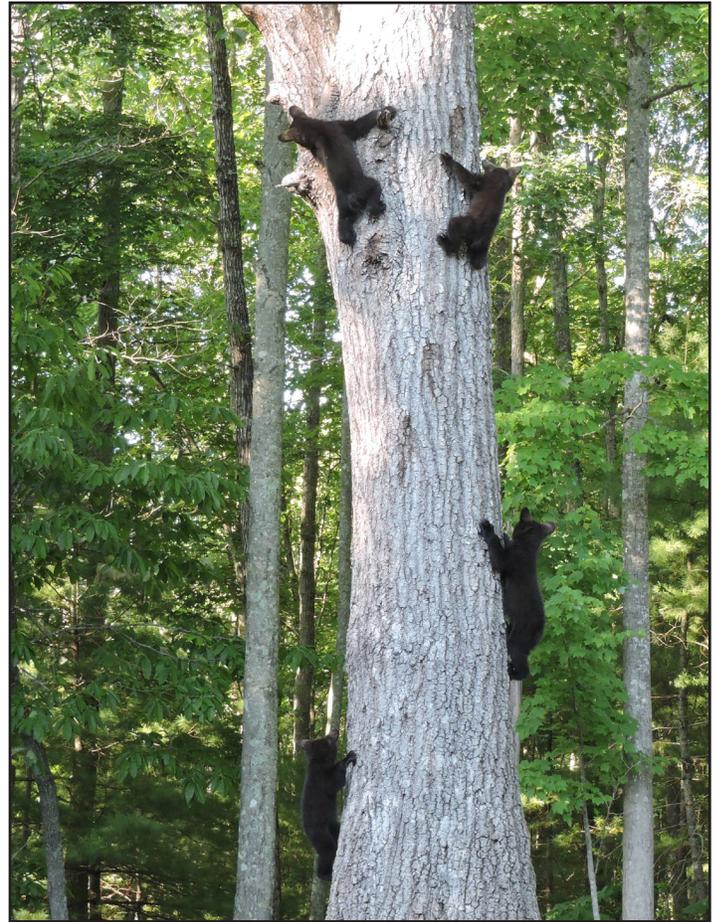
Bears that get habituated to human food are generally the ones that cause trouble. This occurs when humans leave food, food scraps, or garbage available to them. Bears are also attracted to cosmetics, toothpaste, horse and animal feed, grills and grease, all cooking pans and utensils, coolers and food containers.

Never leave unattended crock pots or Dutch ovens cooking at the campsite. If you are camping with a vehicle or horse trailer nearby, place coolers, grills, cooking utensils, horse feed, any food not in use, and anything with food odors inside the locked compartment of a vehicle or trailer (not inside a tent). Wipe off picnic tables, grills, and discard aluminum foil used for cooking. Avoid burning garbage in fire rings because it will leave behind grease and food scraps. Always discard garbage in designated trash cans and dumpsters provided in the campground.

Keep a clean campsite. Unattended food containers and food will be confiscated. Fines will be enforced if food items and garbage are left unattended at your site

In the Backcountry

It is important that food is kept properly stored in backcountry sites as well as developed campgrounds. Bears learn to associate human scent with food. Proper storage limits the human food available to bears and encourages them to forage for natural foods.



Above -- Black bears are superb climbers, even as cubs.

If camping in the backcountry hang your backpacks and bear-resistant food containers. Find two trees approximately 30 feet apart with limbs 15-20 feet above the ground. Throw a rope across the limbs, and allow enough slack to attach your container. Once the food containers are secured to the rope, pull the rope tight and the pack should stabilize high enough where a bear cannot reach it. Containers should be centered between the two trees in case the bear climbs the tree and reach for the food. Any food not in use should be stored in this manner while in the backcountry.

Do not sleep in clothes you have cooked in, as the food odor is left on your clothes and may attract a bear. It is also a good idea to cook some distance from your sleeping area. Plan your meals carefully so that you do not have excess food left over.

What You can do to Help Bears Stay Wild

Prevent nuisance behavior by bears. By following these precautions negative bear-human interactions can be avoided. With your help we can keep black bears wild.

For more information on black bears, please call (423)-569-9778, or stop by any visitor center. Additional information can be found at www.nps.gov/biso.