



## Bear Country!

### Who Are They?

The highest density of black bears (*Ursus americanus*) in California roam the forests and oak woodlands of Redwood National and State Park.

Black, brown, blond, and cinnamon—black bears come in a variety of colors and shades—but black is the most common color. Adult males usually weigh less than 360 pounds (165 kg) and females weigh less than 220 pounds (100 kg). Despite their ungainly appearance, they can run at speeds of up to 25 miles per hour (36km/hr) for short distances.

They also climb trees and swim with agility. Unlike many other mammals, black bears see in color, but their

eyesight is very poor compared to that of humans. To compensate, their sense of smell and hearing are keen.

As intelligent and powerful neighbors, they deserve our protection and respect. Wild bears are naturally curious *and* naturally cautious around people.

*If you are fortunate enough to see a bear in the park, it will probably be running away from you.*



### What Do They Eat And Do They Sleep?



Black bears are omnivores. They are opportunistic feeders that eat a wide variety of plant and animal foods. In the spring, they eat mainly vegetation. Sometimes they rip the bark off trees and eat the sweet cambium layer underneath. If you see shredded bark on a tree while hiking a trail, these are most likely the claw marks of a black bear. Bears also use their powerful, clawed front feet to tear apart rotting logs in search of ants, termites, and insect larvae.

In the fall, bears are instinctively driven to fatten up for the long winter, a time when food is scarce. Bears visit the oak woodlands to gorge on acorns. Nuts and berries are nutritious and fattening. A bear can gain up to three

pounds a day feasting among the oak trees and berry patches. Bears also eat dead animals they discover and occasionally prey on mammals, including very young deer and elk. Historically, steelhead and salmon filled the streams in this area, providing an important food source for black bears.

During the winter months, most bears build dens in hollow logs, stumps, or caves and then crawl in and fall asleep. Their body temperature drops; body functions such as breathing, heartbeat, and digestion slow down. In the redwood forest, bears may remain in their dens hibernating from November through April, but they can awaken and forage about. Females log more den time than males.

### Bear Behavior



The mother bear teaches her cubs where to find food and how to fend for themselves. **A mother bear who is used to seeking out human foods will also pass on this negative habit to her young.** Young bears are very susceptible to human influence. If garbage and handouts are available, they may be regularly tempted to supplement their natural food sources with human foods. Once conditioned to this *easy lifestyle*, they become problem bears.

Bears have very good memories. If they learn to get human food in campgrounds, picnic areas, or from garbage cans, they will return again and again. Bears are very strong and can easily tear open car doors and windows or smash coolers in search of food. In the process of seeking out human foods and becoming accustomed to them, they may lose their fear of people and become aggressive and dangerous. For this reason, Redwood National and State Parks' staff takes an active role in bear management.

## What Are We Doing?



The major goals of bear management at Redwood National and State Parks are to maintain a healthy bear population and to minimize negative human-bear interactions.

Bears that have become accustomed to human foods must be dealt with. The long, narrow shape of Redwood National and State Parks makes it impossible to relocate bears far enough away from their original home ranges to keep them from returning. Problem bears that are captured and released at a new location typically continue their bad habits. Bears are

widespread in California and quite abundant in the coast range. Consequently, bears that cause serious damage or threaten human safety are killed by park personnel. When that happens, everyone loses.

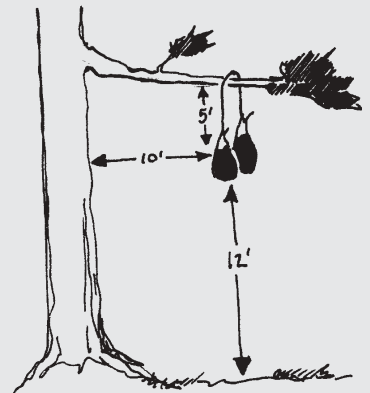
Park biologists and park staff work together to prevent the habituation of bears to human food, but **we need your help!** Our most powerful bear management tool is education. Visitors who follow management recommendations and regulations can live or travel safely in bear country and insure the safety and long-term survival of bears as well.

At Redwood National and State Parks, our goal is to keep negative human-bear interactions to a

minimum. By following these regulations, you will reduce the likelihood of personal injury or property damage.

### WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

- Check in at park visitor centers for information on campgrounds with bear-proof lockers. If your campground does not have lockers, you may be able to borrow a bear-proof canister to pack in and protect your food.
- If bear-proof storage is unavailable, hang food, garbage, and attractants 10 feet out from a tree trunk and 12 feet up from the ground. Pack all your garbage out with you. Cook and store food at least 100 feet away from where you sleep. Wash dishes immediately after use.
- You can protect wildlife from becoming aggressive by keeping a clean camp or picnic area. Never feed bears or other wildlife.
- Always use bear-proof garbage cans and food storage lockers.
- Put food items away immediately after eating. Store food and scented personal care items (toothpaste, shampoo, etc.) in the trunk of your car.
- If a bear approaches: **STAND UP** and wave your arms. **SHOUT** and make loud noises. Throwing small rocks in the bear's direction will usually send it running. Be bold, but use good judgement. If you feel threatened, **WALK** away, don't run. Do not turn your back on the bear. Do not drop your pack.
- Park biologists need your help to find out where bears have been sighted and their current behavior. Your observations help us learn where we need to install bear-proof containers and keep an eye on bears who may become problems.
- If you see a bear, please fill out a wildlife observation card at an visitor center. If you see a bear in a high-use area (campgrounds, parking lots, etc.) or if a bear has obtained human food/garbage, contact a ranger immediately.



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