

Urban Wildlife Issues  
Wildlife Rescue column by Nicky Fried  
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## Black Bears



Bears are big in BC. There are an estimated 120,000 black bears and about 13,500 grizzlies making this province their home.

Trouble happens when humans and bears come into contact. And for the most part it's the bears who are likely to get the rough end of the stick when meeting up with humans. Every year in BC, some 200 to 400 black bears and 10 to 30 grizzly bears are killed because they were perceived to be dangerous to human life or property.

Let's face it; a close encounter with a bear is not on the top of many people's to do list. A full grown black bear weighs between 90 and 250 kgs. But those encounters are becoming more and more frequent. The reasons are mostly associated with the need to survive.

- Bears need large quantities of food to stay alive and produce young. Odours from carelessly stored food and garbage can lure bears long distances. And bears have exceptional memories. Once a bear has tasted human food or garbage, it will remember the source and return again and again - bears have been known to return hundreds of kilometres to a human food source after having been relocated.
- Young male bears are not tolerated by adult bears. They may search for new habitats and may be forced to wander near humans. Females with cubs may also be forced to feed near human settlements because adult male bears may kill cubs.
- Bears are for the most part omnivores. Berries, salmon, and succulent vegetation are important bear foods. Droughts or frost may result in a food shortage, and bears will travel hundreds of kilometres in search of food. Although they generally avoid us, a hungry bear will have less fear of humans.
- Orphaned cubs and old, sick, or injured bears may be unable to forage, and may seek out easier sources, such as human food or garbage.

If you encounter a bear in the Lower Mainland, it is likely a black bear. In fact the grizzly is now extinct in the Lower Mainland. Black bears are usually more tolerant of humans and are more likely to live near humans. They are also excellent tree climbers and use

this as a method of escape. Grizzlies are more aggressive and a female will fight for her cubs with no escape route available.

Colour is not a good indicator of difference between the two species. The grizzly has a pronounced shoulder hump, a concave or “dished” facial profile and much larger claws than the black bear. (Let's hope no one gets close enough to find out just how long.) Black bears have a flatter, “Roman-nosed” profile, larger ears and no hump.

Contrary to popular belief bears are not unpredictable. Like us they use body language to communicate. The problem is that they are very physical creatures and very large and their posturing and swats are very intimidating to a defenseless human.

Bears also use scent to communicate. It's their wireless internet connection. They have 100 times more nasal mucosa than we do. And they are capable of communicating a myriad of complex social messages through trails of airborne scent; scent transferred to twigs, branches and grasses; and scents left on purpose by tree biting or rubbing, as well as scat or urine marks.

There have been a number of bear stories in the media recently, likely because the mating season is coming to an end. But don't expect to see another batch of baby bears in the fall. Delayed implantation keeps fertilized eggs from beginning development into embryos until around the start of the denning season. If female bears do not attain sufficient body fat or weight, the embryo will not develop. Cubs are born January or February.

Keep yourself and these remarkable animals safe. Follow these simple rules.

- Don't leave garbage outside. Bears are very strong and have been known to bend car doors to get at food;
- If you are walking in areas bears are known to frequent, make lots of noise, especially near streams, dense berry patches and on windy days;
- If eating in the wild, properly store your food;
- Dispose of fish offal in fast moving streams or the deep part of a lake, never along stream sides or lake shores;
- Keep an eye open for bears, tracks, droppings or signs such as turned-over logs and rocks;
- Report bears to authorities;
- Never approach or feed a bear;

Nicky Fried writes for the Wildlife Rescue Association of BC located at 5216 Glencarin Drive on Burnaby Lake. The Wildlife Rescue Association cares for injured, orphaned and pollution damaged wildlife. If you have an animal in distress call the WRA at 604.526.7275.