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Safety

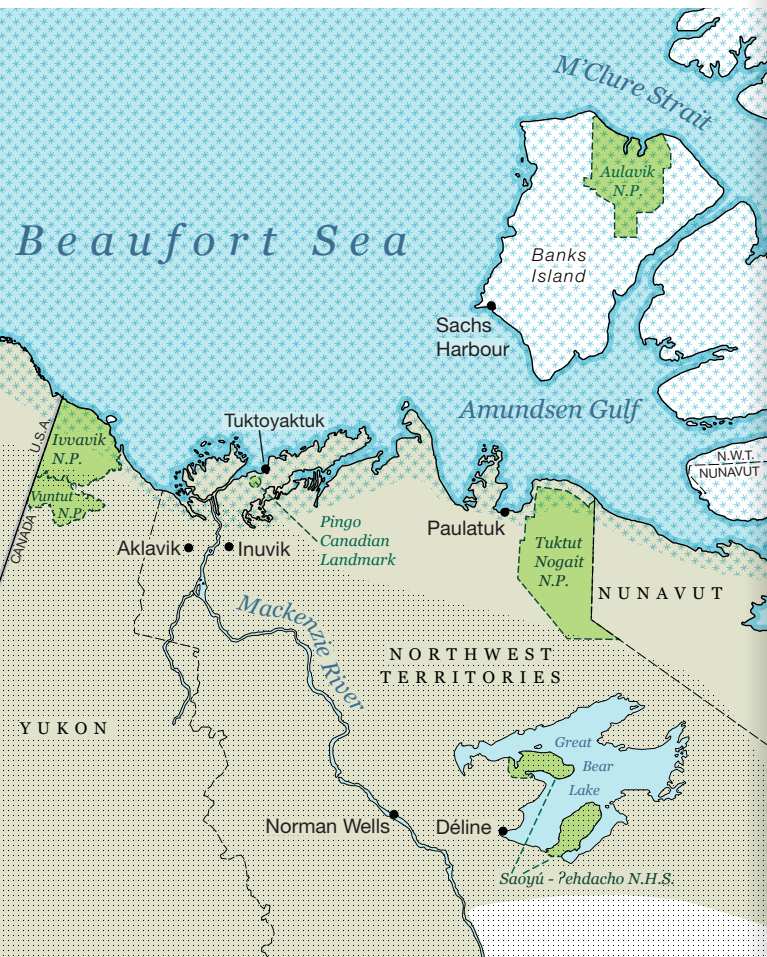
in Grizzly and
Black Bear Country



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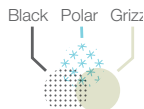
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Bear species distribution

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National parks and national historic sites introduce visitors to landscapes that are uniquely Canadian.

These parks and sites are more than scenic wonderlands; they are home to many animals that depend on wilderness areas for their survival. This booklet presents an approach for understanding black bears and grizzly bears and offers practical advice on how you can minimize your risks while visiting these beautiful places.

Bear habitat is found throughout all of the parks

and sites located in Canada's western Arctic, however the habitat of each species varies (see map on inside front cover). Please note that this booklet specifically addresses grizzly and black bear behaviour. Polar Bears are found within the western Arctic but are not addressed within this booklet. For more information on Polar Bears within the Arctic, please refer to the Parks Canada publication "Staying Safe in Polar Bear Country".

Bear species range within Western Arctic Field unit

Staying safe

Bears are magnificent, fascinating animals. Although people and bears have been interacting for thousands of years, our views about bears are often based more on fear than understanding. Bear behaviour is more predictable than most people think. Studying how bears interact can teach us a lot about how they avoid or resolve conflicts.

While there is no guarantee that advice in this booklet will prevent you from being harmed by a bear, it can help you reduce your risks. By understanding and applying a few safety principles, you can make your next trip into bear country safer for both you and the bears.

Acknowledgements

The content of this booklet is based on the principals of the *Safety in Bear Country Society* and was developed with permission and assistance from the Yukon Government. Sources include messaging from the *Safety in Bear Country Society*, information from the *Staying Safe in Bear Country* video, Yukon Government publications, and assistance from Andy McMullen, wildlife safety consultant. The *Staying Safe in Bear Country* video was developed in collaboration with the International Association for Bear Research and Management, with the input of many world renowned bear experts who have spent thousands of hours studying bear behaviour as well as bear-human interactions and conflicts.

Parks Canada thanks all those who have provided content and assistance in the production of this publication.



Bear facts

Bears:

- are intelligent and curious animals;
- are very strong swimmers;
- can move much faster than any human...over any terrain...uphill and down;
- are good climbers, black bears are much better at climbing trees than grizzly bears, but many grizzlies are able to climb as well;
- have vision comparable to humans;
- have better hearing than humans;
- have an acute sense of smell. They often stand up to catch a scent or get a better look.

Behaviour

Bear behaviour is more predictable than most people realize. We know that:

- mother bears are very protective of their offspring;
- their quest for food shapes every aspect of a bear's life. They spend much of their time searching for food to support growth, sustain their offspring, and prepare for winter denning;
- bears resting near a food source, such as a carcass, can be very aggressive if they feel their food source is threatened;
- bears that receive food from human can become aggressive in their search for more food.



Credit: Pierre O'Hausse



Credit: P. Timpany

Bear identification

Black bears

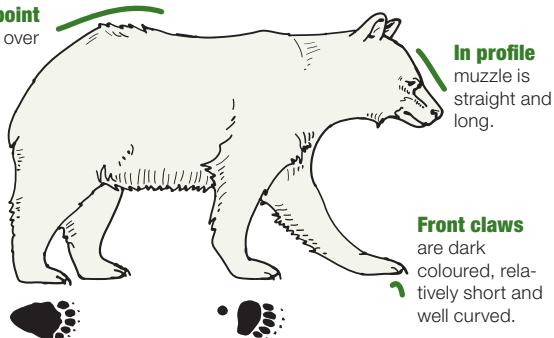
Black bears are usually black, but they can be many shades of brown and blonde. They lack a shoulder hump, and have shorter claws than grizzlies.

On average adult males weight about 135 kg (300lbs) and adult females weight 70 kg (150 lbs). The black bear's diet can be up to 90% vegetation. Unlike grizzlies, black bears seldom

eat plant roots. Berry crops are critical. Before berries ripen, or in years when the crop fails, black bears will forage widely for food including human sources.

Black bears evolved in forested habitats and are agile climbers. Consequently, when a black bear is threatened, it usually seeks the safety of the forest rather than standing its ground and fighting.

Highest point of back is over hind legs.



6 Tracks often do not include claw imprints. Toes imprint with space between.

Grizzly bears

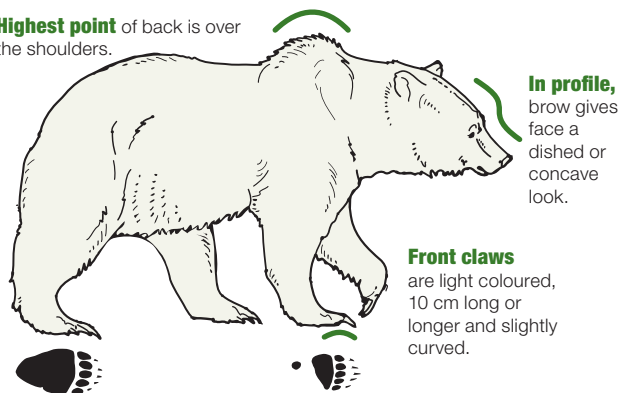
Grizzly fur can vary in color, from blonde to red to dark brown-or even black. Silver-tipped hairs can give them a "grizzled" appearance. They usually have a prominent hump over the shoulder, and their front claws are long and specialized for digging

Adult males weigh about 250 kg (550 lbs) and adult females about 150 kg (330 lbs), although weight can

vary significantly depending on the quality and quantity of food available to the bear.

Grizzly bears evolved in open habitats and without the ability to use escape cover to hide from danger. As a result, when they feel threatened, they are inclined to defend themselves. Today's grizzlies live in open and forested habitats. In some places they can be more abundant than black bears.

Highest point of back is over the shoulders.



7 Tracks usually include claw imprints. Toes imprint very close to touching.



Staying safe

The key to staying safe is prevention, using preventative measures will help reduce bear encounters.

The following practices can help you stay safe when in bear country



Travel in groups, stay aware of your surroundings

Safety when walking or hiking

- Where possible, choose routes with good visibility.
- Be alert and aware of your surroundings. Look for recent bear sign such as tracks, scat, carcasses fresh diggings or tree scratches. If you encounter any of these signs, be on the lookout for a bear.
- If you see a bear, go back the way you came or detour and ensure that you give the bear plenty of space.
- Travel in groups.
- Make noise, loud talking or singing is better than bells to let bears know that you are coming, especially in thick brush and near berry patches and running water.
- Use binoculars or telephoto lens instead of approaching a bear for a closer look or better photo.
- Ask Parks Canada staff about current bear activity.



Credit: Parks Canada

**Stay aware
of your
surroundings**

Safety when fishing

- Stay alert. Look for bear signs such as tracks, scat, fresh diggings or partly eaten fish. If you encounter any of these signs, be on the lookout for a bear. If you see a bear, ensure you give the bear plenty of space.
- Fish with a friend. Bears are less likely to be aggressive towards groups of people.
- Make noise, especially when your visibility is limited. If a bear hears you coming it will probably leave the area.
- Gut your catch at the shoreline, not at camp. Put the guts in water. Pop the air bladder so the guts will sink.
- Try to not get fish odours on your clothes. Wash your hands, knife and cutting board after cleaning the fish.
- If tenting store fish and food away from your tent in bear-resistant and odour-proof containers.



Credit: Parks Canada

**Choose your
campsite
carefully**

Safety when camping

- Choose a campsite well away from wildlife trails, spawning streams, signs of recent bear activity, and bear food such as berry patches.
- Set up tents in a line rather than in a circle and maintain at least 5 metres between the tents. By doing this if a bear comes into camp, it will not feel surrounded and will have an avenue of escape without feeling threatened.
- Store garbage in bear-resistant or odour-proof containers and pack it out. Bear-resistant containers can be borrowed from Parks Canada offices in Inuvik, Paulatuk or Sachs Harbour. For more info contact Parks Canada in any of these communities.
- Don't bring greasy, smelly foods like bacon and canned fish.
- Store and cook food well away from your sleeping area, downwind if possible.



Proper use of bear spray is crucial, learn how to use it and factors that can affect its use

Deterrents

There are a number of tools that can help you deter a bear, including bear spray, and a variety of noise makers such as bear bangers.

In your tent, keep deterrents close at hand.

Deterrents are helpful if used properly but they are not 100% effective. Make sure you are familiar with how deterrents work and how to use them before you need them. And don't let deterrents give you a false sense of security.

Bear spray

Bear spray can be effective with some bears when used properly. It should only be used at close range—on an aggressive or attacking bear. Carry it ready to use, not in your pack. Before

using it, ensure the nozzle is pointed away from you.

Exercise caution...if discharged upwind or in a confined space, bear spray can affect or disable the user. You may have to discharge your spray more than once to repel a determined bear. If you plan to carry bear spray, be aware that wind, spray distance, rain, freezing temperature and product shelf life can all influence its effectiveness.

Note: Bear spray should not be applied to property or an area as a preventative measure.

Noisemakers

Noisemakers such as air horns, pistol and pen launched bear bangers may scare a bear away. Make sure these are accessible when carrying them with you. It is also important that you familiarize yourself

Attractants

Not everything a bear smells is food, but all things that smell may attract a foraging bear. There are some common items that may attract a bear to your campsite or even you:

- Propane and other petroleum-based products
- Pet food
- Oil
- Garbage
- Toothpaste, soap, lotions, feminine hygiene products and other toiletry items
- Improperly stored food
- Camp stoves, pots, pans, dishes and utensils

with the use of these devices to ensure that when you discharge the noisemakers the noise occurs between the user and the bear. If it is discharged too close in proximity to the bear, it is possible to overshoot the bear and scare it towards you.

Transportation

Commercial deterrent availability may be limited in the north, contact Parks Canada to find out which deterrents can be locally purchased before travelling to the north. Bear spray, bear bangers and compressed air horns are subject to Transportation of Dangerous Goods Regulations and are not allowed on scheduled passenger aircraft. If you plan to purchase these types of deterrents in the south you must make the appropriate

If a bear succeeds in getting an easy meal from improperly stored attractants, it is almost certain to return or seek the same food elsewhere.



arrangements for their safe transport well in advance of your arrival in the north.

Bear monitor

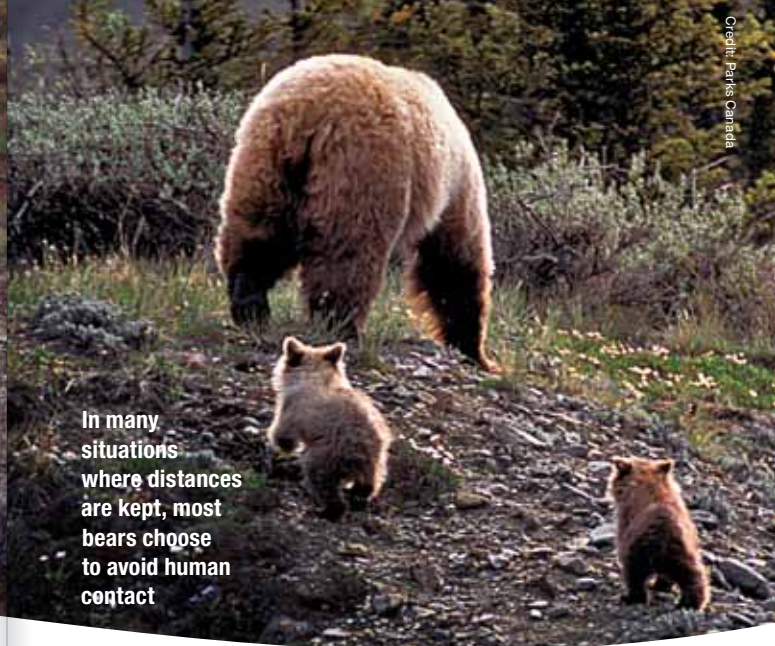
If you are uncertain about your ability to deal with bears, consider hiring a bear monitor. For more information about bear monitors in the western Arctic, contact the Parks Canada office in Inuvik for assistance.

Firearms

Firearms cannot be used in the Western Arctic National Parks and National Historic Sites by non-land claims' beneficiaries, unless you have proper approval and permits. For more information contact the Parks Canada office in Inuvik.



Credit: Parks Canada



Credit: Parks Canada

In many situations where distances are kept, most bears choose to avoid human contact

How do bears relate to other bears?

Bears spend much of their time alone but they are also social animals and have a social structure. Large individuals are dominant over smaller or newly independent juvenile bears. Dominant bears have the best access to preferred feeding sites and mates.

While each bear has a home range, these ranges overlap. Yet each bear maintains and defends its own immediate, personal space. Bears may or may not tolerate the presence of another bear.

A bear's body language communicates a great deal about its mood or temperament, as well as conveying important signs of dominance or submission.

Most encounters between bears involve caution and avoidance, with the bears slowly separating. But if one ignores the other's warnings or crowds its personal space, the situation can suddenly turn nasty

How do bears relate to humans?

Bears may relate to humans in similar ways as they would to other bears. Bears may also have had previous experience around people and have learned—good or bad—from each interaction.

A bear that is highly dominant among other bears may be less likely to back down from an encounter with humans

- A bear that is low in the social structure with other bears may try to prove its dominance in an encounter with humans.
- A bear that has been fed intentionally or through poorly handled attractants may be more determined to get food in another encounter

Luckily, the most common interaction is a bear avoiding a human who is not even aware of the bear's presence.



This grizzly
is highly
stressed



Wave your
arms slowly,
speak in a
calm voice



Slowly back
away, keep
your eye on
the bear at all
times

Signs of a stressed bear

Whether relating to another bear or to a human, bears use the same behaviours to indicate their stress.

Some are *subtle*, such as:

- a pause in activity;
- yawning;
- a stiffening stance;
- a change in body orientation.

Others are more *obvious*, such as:

- huffing;
- moaning;
- tooth clicking;
- jaw popping.

High stress or aggression is expressed by

- salivating;
- roaring and open-mouth jawing;
- paw swatting;
- guttural sounds;
- a charge-which usually stops short of contact.

A “yawn”
can be a sign
of stress



What do you do if you encounter a bear?

Your best strategy is to avoid unwanted encounters with bears...just as most bears avoid you. But in the wild this isn't always possible. So what should you do if you see a bear?

Stop. Remain calm. Assess the situation..

Does the bear know you're there?

If not, move away quietly, watching for any change in its behaviour. Be careful not to startle it. Shouting at a grizzly that is unaware of you could provoke an attack. Make a wide detour and try to leave undetected. If you see young bears on the ground or in a tree or you hear bear vocalizations, be extremely cautious and go back the way you came, as quietly as possible.

If the bear becomes aware of your presence,

stay calm, and in a non-threatening way, let it know you are a human. Talk to it in a low respectful voice. Wave your arms slowly.

Even if it seems unconcerned, **never approach a bear:** if you crowd it, you might provoke an aggressive response. Instead, walk away slowly, avoiding sudden movements keeping an eye on the bear...and **don't run:** that could trigger a chase.

A bear's usual response to detecting a person is to move away. Let it leave. If you must proceed, do so cautiously giving it plenty of space, making noise as you go.

Report all bear sightings to Parks Canada staff when you return.

What do you do if a bear approaches you?

If a bear starts to approach, you're in a more serious situation. **Stop and remain calm.** Get ready to use any deterrents you may be carrying. **Don't run away** unless there is a safe place so close you're absolutely certain you can reach it before the bear can get to you.

Remember: climbing a tree is not a guarantee of safety. If you are with others, group together. If you are with children pick them up and keep the group together. Keep your pack on; it may protect your back and neck.

This is when you need to assess the bear behaviour and determine **why** it is approaching.

This grizzly is showing defensive behaviour

Defensive behaviour

It may be reacting defensively because it **perceives you as a threat** to itself, its cubs, or its food. Whatever the cause, a defensive bear will likely appear agitated or stressed.

The closer you are when a bear becomes aware of you, the more likely it will react in a defensive manner and the less time you will have to react.

Though most defensive interactions with bears stop short of contact, they do sometimes result in attacks.

With **grizzlies**, defensive attacks almost always stem from surprising a bear at close range—when it's on a carcass or protecting its young. On the rare occasion when a **black** bear attacks defensively, it usually involves a mother defending her young.

This grizzly is showing signs of being curious

Non-defensive behaviour

A bear may approach and take an interest in you for non-defensive reasons as well. It could just be **curious**... it might be after your **food**... or testing its **dominance**...in the rarest case, it might be **predatory**, seeking you as potential prey. All of these non-defensive approaches can appear similar and shouldn't be confused with defensive behaviour.

A CURIOUS BEAR will have a slow, hesitant approach with ears cocked forward and head and nose raised to investigate what you are...

FOOD-CONDITIONED BEARS may be bold and come right into your camp or come looking for food. Sometimes a bear may approach you deliberately to test its **dominance**.

A PREDATORY BEAR will be intensely focused on you as a potential meal. With its head up and ears erect, its approach is confident and persistent. Predatory bears, especially ones that have been food conditioned, have been known to break into structures and attack people. Despite all the media attention predatory attacks are extremely rare.

This grizzly is intent, predatory

Now what do you do?

Credit: SIBCS

Stand
your
ground



Credit: SIBCS

Play
Dead



Defensive reactions

If you think a bear is reacting **DEFENSIVELY**, your goal is to avoid being seen as a threat. Talk to the bear, and let it know you mean no harm. A defensive bear is stressed by your presence. When it no longer feels threatened, it may simply retreat.

A defensive bear might also approach you or even charge. If it does, **stand your ground!** Facing a defensive bear can be terrifying, but it's your best strategy: most defensive charges stop short. **Don't shout or throw anything.** Once it knows there's nothing to fear the bear should calm down and stop its approach. When it is no longer advancing, start slowly moving away, still reassuring it in a calm voice.

An encounter is considered an attack only if the bear contacts you.

If the defensive bear advances again **stop and stand your ground once more!** If the bear seems intent on attack **use your deterrent.**

Finally, if a **DEFENSIVE** bear **attacks**, wait as long as you can before it strikes you, then fall straight to the ground; face down, with your legs spread slightly. Lock your fingers behind your neck. Protect your face and vital organs. If the bear flips you over, roll back into your stomach. Don't cry out or fight back. Once a defensive bear no longer thinks you are a threat, it will stop attacking. Lie still and wait for the bear to leave. Moving too soon may provoke another assault.

A defensive bear attacks to remove a threat. In a grizzly or black bear defensive attack...**play dead.**

Credit: SIBCS

Stand on a
rock or log
to appear
larger



Credit: SIBCS

If a predatory
bear attacks,
fight back!



Non-defensive reactions

Whatever its motivation, when a **NON-DEFENSIVE** bear moves toward you, it will show little stress and your response needs to be assertive: Stay calm and talk to the bear in a firm voice. Try to move out of its way; it may simply want to continue on its path.

If the bear follows and stays focused on you, you are in a dangerous situation.

It is time to become aggressive. **Shout! Stare the bear in the eye.** Make yourself appear as large and threatening as possible. Let it know you'll fight if attacked. Stamp your feet and take a step or two towards the bear. Stand on

a rock or log. **Threaten the bear with anything you can. And use your deterrent.**

If a **NON-DEFENSIVE** bear **attacks**, fight back with all your might. Use any weapon within reach. At this point, you're dealing with a predatory bear intent on eating you. **Be as aggressive as possible, concentrating on the bear's face, eyes and nose. Don't give up! You may be fighting for your life.**

A predatory bear is intent on eating you. In a predatory attack...**fight back.**

Use your
deterrent



Summary

if you come across
a bear that:

A

Isn't aware of your presence:

- Try to move away without getting its attention.

B

Already knows you're there:

- Identify yourself as human by talking and waving your arms.
- Move away without running.

C

Starts to approaches:

- Stand your ground.
- Stay calm.
- Prepare to use your deterrent.
- Determine **what kind** of approach the bear is making.

Defensive Behaviour	Non-Defensive Curious Bear	Non-Defensive Predatory Bear
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lowering its head with ears laid back, staring directly at a person	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ears cocked forward or to the side, head and nose raised	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It's head is up and ears erect, intent and unafraid
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stamping its feet, bluff charge usually stopping short of contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A slow, hesitant approach moving slowly with frequent stops	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Its approach is confident and persistent approaching directly
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Huffing, panting, hissing or jaw snapping,	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Standing on hind legs and sniffing the air, moving its head from side to side	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Following you or circling you, returning after being scared away,
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trying to catch your scent by circling downwind and approaching from behind.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appearing wounded, old or thin.
Defensive Reactions	Non-Defensive Reactions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Try to appear non-threatening.• Talk in a calm voice.• When the bear stop advancing, start slowly moving away.• If it keeps coming closer, stand your ground, keep talking, and use your deterrent.• If the bear attacks, fall on the ground and play dead.• When the attack stops, lie still and wait for the bear to leave.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Talk in a firm voice.• Move out of the bear's path.• If it follows you, stop and stand your ground. Shout and act aggressively. Try to intimidate the bear and use your deterrent. <p><i>If it attacks, fight for your life!</i></p>	

Additional Resources

Parks Canada Safety in Polar Bear Country
brochure, Northwest Territories/Nunavut

Available on VHS & DVD:

- Staying Safe in
Bear Country
- Polar Bears: A
Guide To Safety

Websites:

www.bearsmart.com

www.pc.gc.ca

These productions can be purchased at some book and
souvenir stores or ordered from Distribution Access at:

Toll-free 1-888-440-4640

Fax: 1-780-440-8899

www.distributionaccess.com or [sales@
distributionaccess.com](mailto:sales@distributionaccess.com)

For more information:

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