



# American Black Bear

## *Ursus americanus*

In Redberry Lake Biosphere Reserve

### When and where are they found?

At one time, black bears were found across North America, but were since removed in many areas including southern Saskatchewan, by human settlers and agricultural practices. Black bears can be found in all four municipalities of the Redberry Lake Biosphere Reserve. They are in higher numbers in the northern region (RM 466, Mayfield), but can be encountered south of Redberry Lake.

Black bears hibernate from (month to month), but the exact timing of this can be influenced by the availability of food in the fall. They are typically quite shy, and tend to stay in bushy, forested areas. They are more active at (time of day).

### What do they eat?

Black bears are omnivores, which means they eat both meat and vegetable products. Honey, oats, newborn animals, apple trees, berries and young grass buds are delicacies for them. They are also opportunists, which means they will take advantage of any available food source, including barbeques, garbage, pet food, bird feeders and old grain piles.



Black bears eating garbage at a landfill.

When natural food sources are not plentiful, such as a poor berry crop, bears will go searching for other food sources. This is when they will be

more likely to wander into people's yards and seek out other food sources. If a bear learns that food can be easily accessed from human sources, it can become habituated, meaning it is less afraid of humans, and has associated humans with food. It will be prone to returning to this reliable food source and more likely to defend itself if it is encountered. This is when a bear can become a threat to safety of humans, pets and livestock. A sow can teach her cubs this behaviour, thereby amplifying the problem.

### What do I do if I see a bear?

If you are out in the open, stop and stay calm. Slowly retreat to your vehicle or infrastructure (do not run), and observe its behaviour from there. Do not climb a tree or enter water – these will not guarantee your safety. Look around for cubs and potential food sources. Chances are it is just passing through. If the bear is in a tree, simply leave the area the way you came.

If you cannot retreat to cover, then back away slowly, keeping watch, but not direct eye contact with the bear. Make it aware of your presence by standing tall, waving your arms slowly above your head, and speaking in a low voice, assertively. This may be enough to cause it to flee.

**Note: there is no need to call conservation officers if the bear is not bothering anyone or causing damage to property.**

A bear that feels threatened will often display signs of agitation and stress through vocal and/or visual cues such as huffing, popping its jaws, pacing, swinging its head or excessive salivation. This may escalate to slapping the ground or a tree, bluff charging (stopping short of contact). Its head will be lowered with ears

drawn back while facing you.

Attacks by black bears on humans are quite rare. Contrary to common belief, most attacks occur by predatory males, not females with cubs (ref). If the bear comes towards you in an aggressive manner (head low, staring intently at you), stand your ground while continuing to speak assertively in a low voice. Do not run – running will make you appear as vulnerable to the bear. Have a sturdy object ready in hand.

If the bear makes contact with you:

- Fall to the ground laying face down with legs slightly apart.
- Lock your fingers behind your head/neck.
- If the bear flips you over, roll back onto your stomach.
- Do not struggle or cry out.
- Do not move until you are sure the bear has left.
- If the attack lasts more than several minutes, fight with anything you have. Try to hit it on the nose (the most sensitive area on a bear).

A predatory bear's approach will be deliberate and silent. Its head will be up and ears erect, displaying no signs of stress.

In this case:

- Stop and stand your ground.
- Make direct eye contact.
- Act aggressively to persuade the bear you are not easy prey.
- Shout, wave your arms, stomp your feet.
- Stand on a log or rock and raise your jacket to look bigger.

### **What do I do if a bear is on my property?**

If the bear is passing through, then there is no need to do anything other than observe. Let your neighbours know, and make sure there are no attractants that could encourage it to hang around. Make a note of the sighting and characteristics of the bear for future reference purposes.

**The best thing you can do to prevent conflicts is to minimize attractants on your property.**

#### *Best practices for all property owners*

- **DO NOT FEED BEARS!!**
- Store garbage and recycling in a secure location. Dispose as quickly as possible. Do not burn garbage.

- Do not use blood meal or fish-based products to fertilize your lawn or garden. Keep your lawn mowed and weeded. Grass and dandelion flowers may attract bears. Put an electric fence around gardens.
- Aerate your compost pile frequently – cover it with soil or lime to reduce odours. Hot compost plant matter. Avoid adding kitchen scraps to it. Keep the compost away from tree cover. Do not compost meat, fish, fruit, vegetable, grease, oil, or dairy products outdoors. Consider indoor worm composting for these products.
- Put away bird feeders in early spring and early winter, when bears are most active – consider replacing it with a bird bath or nesting box
- Store pet food indoors - do not leave food scraps lying around yard and bring dishes in after feeding.
- Store barbecues indoors when not in use and clean them frequently.
- Consider removing the fruit trees and berry bushes from your property. If that's not possible, pick the fruit or berries as early as you can, and never let them rot on the ground. Consider putting an electric fence around fruit trees. Bears will travel great distances to feed on fruit trees in the fall.
- Keep a clean backyard, and remove anything that may attract a bear.
- Rinse all containers before disposing and recycling.
- Turn off kitchen exhaust fans that have vents to the outside when they're not in use. Make sure the vent screen is cleaned regularly.
- Clean the outside end of your drain if you do not have a holding tank to contain flushed food particles in dishwasher.
- Do not leave dirty diapers or diaper pails outside.
- Talk to your neighbours about taking the same preventative measures.

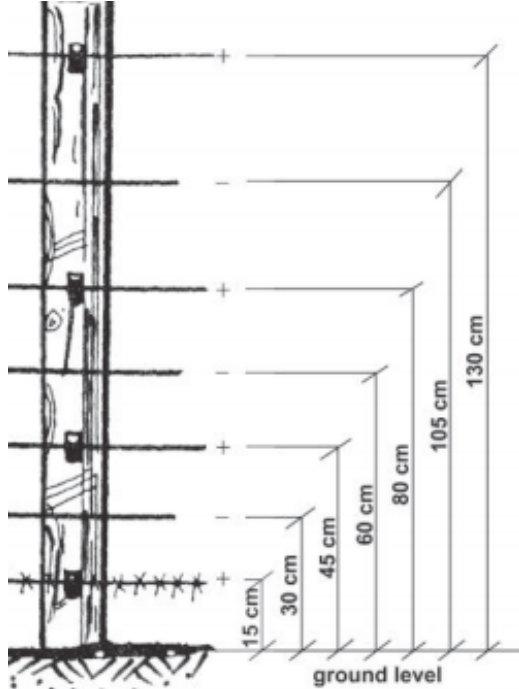
#### *Best practices for farmers*

- Remove waste grain and clean grain bins when not in use, clean up spills as soon as possible
- Be cautious when working or traveling by cereal crops
- Ensure all granaries and doors are sturdy in construction
- Locate storage bins away from areas of human use and known bear habitat

#### *Best practices for livestock operations*

- Store livestock feed indoors or in secure containers
- Keep livestock confined for at least 10 days following castration, dehorning or branding.
- Make regular herd inspections – bears will target sick or injured animals.

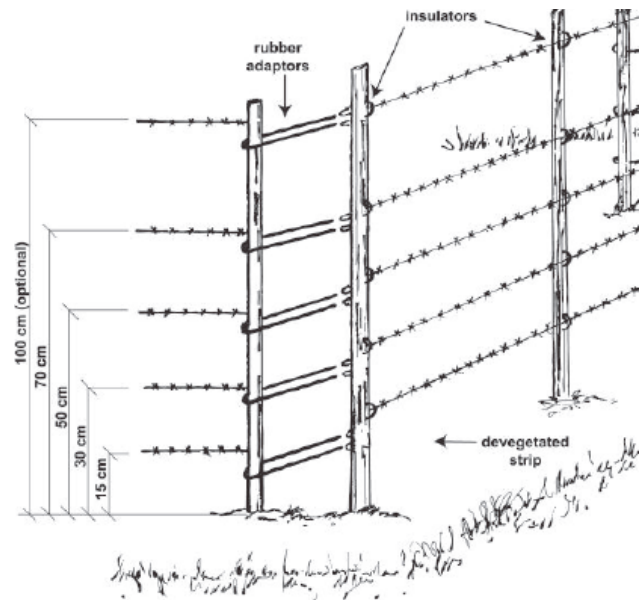
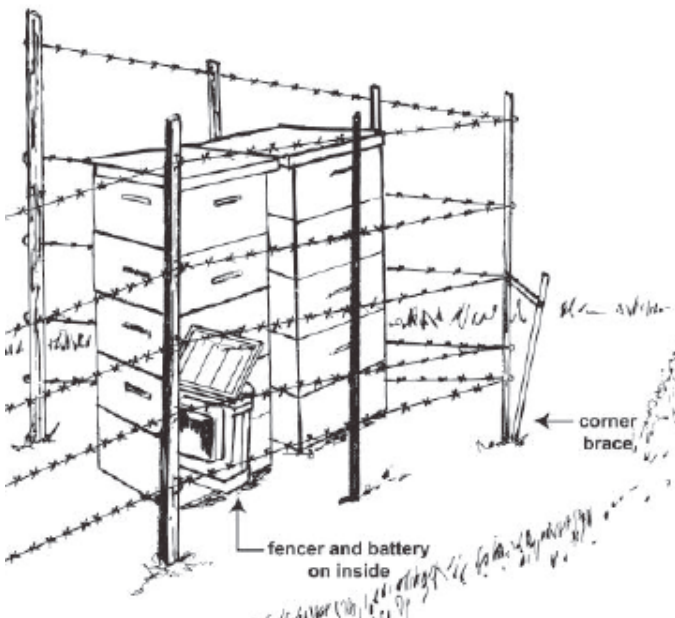
- Burning or burying carcasses, food or other wastes should be done away from any infrastructure and feeding areas. Burying should be done at least 4 feet, and covered with lime.
- Immediately report any incidents where you think a bear has attacked your livestock.
- Install electric fences around calving and lambing areas.



Electric fencing design for calving and lambing areas.  
Copied from Alberta Bear Smart Bears and Farming, Ranching and Beekeeping brochure

### Beekeepers

Electric fencing is the best method for preventing damage to hives. Ensure honey is stored within sturdy infrastructure with a strong door.



Images copied from the Alberta Bear Smart Bears and Farming, Ranching and Beekeeping brochure

### Problem bears

If a bear appears to be hanging around and/or causing damage, call the Ministry of Environment: number. They will likely set a trap to capture and dispatch the bear.

Black bears are listed as a pest species in Saskatchewan. The province's legislation under the General Rights of Saskatchewan Landowners and Residents permits the killing of bears and other carnivores on private property without a license, and with special permission for persons holding a forest grazing permit on crown land. Beekeepers may kill black bears within one kilometer of their hives. Any bears that are killed for this purpose must be reported to the Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment Resource Management (SERM) officers.

**SERM North Battleford office: (306) 446-7416**

The Ministry of Agriculture (SCIC) provides 100% compensation for confirmed predation death of livestock, or 50% compensation where a predator-caused death cannot be confirmed.

**SCIC toll-free: 1-888-935-0000.**

### Harvesting black bears

Redberry Lake Biosphere Reserve is located within the provincial wildlife management zones 44 and 54 (separated by Hwy 40). Black bear

hunting and trapping is allowed in both these zones in the spring and fall with valid hunting tags and trapper's licences. The limit is one bear per year per person. Both sexes may be hunted, with the exception of a sow with cubs at heel. Non-resident hunters must go through an outfitter.

**Note: Hunting is not allowed within protected areas, like the Redberry Lake. Permission must be obtained from property owners to hunt on private lands.**

## **Sources**

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