

# American Black Bears in California State Parks



Photo:  
Janice Clark

State Parks and Campgrounds in the  
Sierra District are situated in areas  
that are also black bear habitat.

Thanks to the following agencies  
for their assistance:

El Dorado County  
U.S. Forest Service,  
Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit  
California Department of Fish and Game  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Tahoe Council for Wild Bears  
Yosemite National Park  
Sequoia National Park

California State Parks, Sierra District:

Mono Lake Tufa SNR  
Bodie SHP  
Grover Hot Springs SP  
Lake Valley SRA  
Washoe Meadows SP  
Emerald Bay SP  
DL Bliss SP  
Ed Z'berg Sugar Pine Point SP  
Ward Creek Unit  
Tahoe SRA  
Burton Creek SP  
Kings Beach SRA  
Donner Memorial SP  
Plumas Eureka SP  
Malakoff Diggins SHP  
Empire Mine SHP  
South Yuba River SP



For more information contact:  
Park Office, Campground Entry Station or

California State Parks  
Sierra District Headquarters  
P. O. Box 266  
7360 West Lake Blvd. (Highway 89)  
Tahoma, CA 96142  
(530) 525-7232

© 2008 California State Parks (Rev. 2010)

**Black bears (*Ursus americanus*)**  
are an important component  
of California's ecosystems and a  
valuable natural legacy for the  
people of California. The black  
bear is the only species of bear  
remaining in California and  
Nevada. The common name  
"black bear" is misleading;  
California black bears may be  
black, brown, cinnamon, even  
blonde. Some bears have a  
white patch on the chest.



## BEAR ENCOUNTERS - Never approach a bear!

**In the campground:** Do not run. Be aggressive; assert your dominance by standing tall and making noise to scare the bear away. Loudly banging pots and pans together and shouting may work.

**In the woods:** This is the bear's territory; respect that and do not run. Make eye contact, but don't stare. Pick up small children. Make yourself appear as large as possible. Stay calm and quiet—back away slowly. Black bears will usually avoid confrontation with humans. Bears will often climb a tree if frightened and usually won't come down as long as humans or dogs are present.

### Get out of the way!

If the bear attempts to get away, do not block the bear's escape route.

**Report all bear encounters** in state park campgrounds and picnic areas to staff at the park office or entrance station, to campground hosts or to rangers on patrol.

Strict regulations are in place to reduce conflicts between humans and bears. There is *zero tolerance* for non-compliance.

- Bear-resistant food storage lockers are available at all Sierra District Campgrounds.
- All food and refuse must be stored in the bear-resistant lockers provided at all times unless it is actively being used or transported.
- Food-storage lockers must always be closed when not in use whether or not food or refuse is present.
- Food that cannot be stored in the provided bear-resistant lockers must be discarded.
- No food, refuse or scented items may be stored in a vehicle in the campground at any time.
- Non-compliance may result in eviction from the park or other law enforcement action.



# Black Bears

**Facts** Adults typically weigh 100 to 400 pounds and measure between 4 and 6 feet from tip of nose to tail. Males are larger than females. Some adult males may weigh over 500 pounds. Wild bears may live about 25 years.

Females give birth to one to three cubs in January, during hibernation. Typically, bears have young every other year.

Black bears have curved claws that allow them to climb trees. They often climb to retreat from threats, including humans. A healthy bear may run up to 30 miles per hour for short distances. Black bears are excellent swimmers; they can cross up to 1½ miles of open fresh water for food.

**Diet** Bears are omnivorous; their teeth are designed for crushing rather than cutting food, like meat-eating carnivore teeth. Bears' diets are based on seasonal availability of food. Black bears' diets consist of seven food categories: grasses, berries, nuts, insects, small mammals, wood fiber, and carrion (decaying flesh).

Food shortages occur in summer and fall when wild food becomes scarce. Bears get bolder and may encounter humans in their search for food.

The trunk of your car and your cooler are not bear-proof! Bears may learn to associate wrappers and containers with food and can identify them by sight. They also learn to open vehicle doors.

**Behavior** Black bears can be active any time during the day or night. As winter approaches, bears will forage for food up to 20 hours a day to store enough fat to sustain them through hibernation.

Black bears may scavenge in garbage cans and dumpsters; they will break into and demolish the interiors of houses, garages, cars and campers. Bears will also raid campsites and food caches, sometimes injuring people. Often these incidents result from careless human behavior. Black bears will usually try to avoid confrontation with humans. If encountered, always leave a bear a clear escape route especially a bear with cubs.



Photo:  
Tammy Evans



Photo:  
Janice Clark



Photo:  
Scott Elliott

# Never Feed a Bear!

People should never feed bears, even unintentionally. Once bears get food from people, they begin to associate all humans with food. Without a natural fear of people, bears become increasingly aggressive.

- Black bears have a very keen sense of smell and are attracted to any food or refuse they can smell. A California black bear was once tracked as it traveled three miles upwind, in a straight line, to a food source.
- Store food, beverages, toiletries and any scented items at all times—day and night—in the bear-resistant lockers provided.
- Keep sleeping bags, tents and sleeping areas free of food and beverage odors.
- Clean everything after preparing a meal.
- Dispose of garbage properly. If a bear-resistant dumpster is not available, store your garbage in bear-resistant lockers provided at campgrounds until it can be disposed of properly.



Photo:  
Tammy Evans

## A Fed Bear is a Dead Bear!

What you know and do can prevent injury to bears and property—even to you, your family and friends! Once accustomed to sources of human food, bears will seek them out, creating conflicts with humans. The bear's behavior cannot be easily corrected. Bears may have to be killed if they do not change. To avoid these deaths, food sources must be removed.