



Hunting and Fishing Around Bears in Louisiana

Caution, Not Fear

Caution is the rule when dealing with black bears. Black bears, unlike brown, grizzly or polar bears, seldom attack people. Over the decades and with countless opportunities, only a few records exist of black bears attacking humans.

Most adult male black bears weigh between 250 and 400 pounds, and adult females tilt the scales between 180 and 250 pounds, making black bears appear as formidable animals. They get by in life for the most part by puffing up, stomping feet, snapping jaws and grunting.

Black bears are very intelligent and exceptionally curious, especially when it comes to interesting odors. You can hunt in bear country for years and never see a bear, even when you frequently see signs (scat, tracks and claw and bite marks on trees).

Bears usually will smell and hear humans and will move out of your path long you see them. If you are deer hunting in bear country and you've done a good job masking your human scent (de-scented field clothes, rubber boots, buck lure, etc.), don't be surprised if "brer bear" follows your scented boot trail right up to your stand. He may lean up against your stand to get a better sniff! Merely standing up or uttering a "Hi ya, bear!" or "Get outa here!" will almost always send the bear scampering.

In some areas of the country, backpackers, foresters and rangers carry various pepper sprays that have been shown to be temporarily effective on bears. Problems arise when these products incapacitate the users by being sprayed upwind or accidentally discharged in a closed area. The best advice in bear country is: Use good judgment!

Keep it Clean

Black bears normally are not aggressive, but they can be dangerous if provoked. Like any animal, bears are most likely to become dangerous in conflicts over food.

Campsites often are an easy source of food for these animals, especially if attractants, including garbage bags, pet food and so forth are kept outside in open containers. Once a bear becomes accustomed to a regular food source, it can be difficult to convince the bear to leave and not come back. It is much easier to keep bears from being attracted to hunting camps, campsites or picnic areas before a problem starts.

Campsites, including buildings, should be kept as clean as possible. Specific areas should be designated for cleaning of fish and game, and these areas should be cleaned thoroughly after each use. Refuse from cleaning should be buried deeply or stored in a bear-proof container and removed from the site. Keep garbage in a locked container and remove it when you leave the camp.

Bears will search a container for any cracks or openings they can get their teeth or claws into to rip open the container. Bears will claw or chew on the material until it gives way – or they will knock or jump on the container until it breaks open. Sealed containers that reduce odors or leaking of food material are recommended. Suitable containers include a locker or a steel drum with locking snap rings. PVC plastic tubes may be used as long as the





diameter is large enough to prevent the bear from crushing the tube with its mouth.

Absolutely no food or garbage should be left

in an unoccupied campsite. Corn for baiting should be kept in a locked food container inside a storage shed or inside the camp house. Do not leave any food in deer stands or in a parked vehicle, including a four-wheeler or boat. Discarded food wrappers, including candy bar wrappers, soft drink cans and pastry wrappings, are attractants and should not be thrown on the ground. The best thing to do to avoid attracting bears is what not to do: "Don't litter!"

Always remember, sanitation is the key to avoiding problems with bears around your "home away from home!"

Baits and Bears

The seasonal abundance of natural foods such as berries and acorns will not deter black bears from taking advantage of food options provided by humans. When you are using supplemental feeding as part of a deer management program, planting of food plots with cereal grains such as wheat, oats or ryegrass is the best alternative for avoiding conflicts with black bears. Using feeders in white-tailed deer management can potentially cause conflicts between black bears and humans.

Whole kernel corn is the most common type of grain for feeding white-tailed deer. Distributing corn or other grains in piles on the ground or in open feeders, known as "free feeding," is not only costly in terms of the amount needed but also invites problems where black bears regularly occur. Free feeding provides a reliable food supply, making conflicts unavoidable. Large amounts of corn left in an open environment are usually not consumed

in time to prevent souring. The odor of sour grain is an excellent bear attractant because of their keen sense of smell. The distribution of grain in smaller amounts by "controlled feeding," using timed feeding mechanisms, is a more cost-effective means of providing supplemental food for white-tailed deer.

Many types of timed feeding mechanisms exist, varying from homemade rigs to more elaborate electrical devices available at many feed stores or hunting supply outlets. Whatever design is used, the method of placement is the most critical factor in avoiding black bear confrontations. The agility and resourcefulness of black bears require that any type of feeding device be suspended out of their reach. The following figures illustrate hanging designs which can be effective in avoiding black bear problems.



It is recommended that the base of any hanging feeder be at least 8 feet above the ground. In addition, the top should be at least 4 feet from the attachment point. Feeder tops should be tightly sealed. To prevent climbing bears from pulling feeders to within their reach, it is recommended that small diameter cables be used for suspension.

When you are using direct feeding of corn and other grains, controlled feeding devices hung in the proper manner will eliminate many problems that occur when black bear and white-tailed deer are found in the same area.

Who do you contact?

If you experience any problem with bears, there are several agencies and groups available to help you.

Black Bear Conservation Coalition

P. O. Box 80442
Baton Rouge, LA 70898
225-763-5425

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

5652 Highway 182
Opelousas, LA. 70570
337-948-0255

U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services

P. O. Box 589
Port Allen, LA 70767
225-389-0229

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

646 Cajundome Blvd.
Lafayette, LA 70506
337-291-3124

Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge

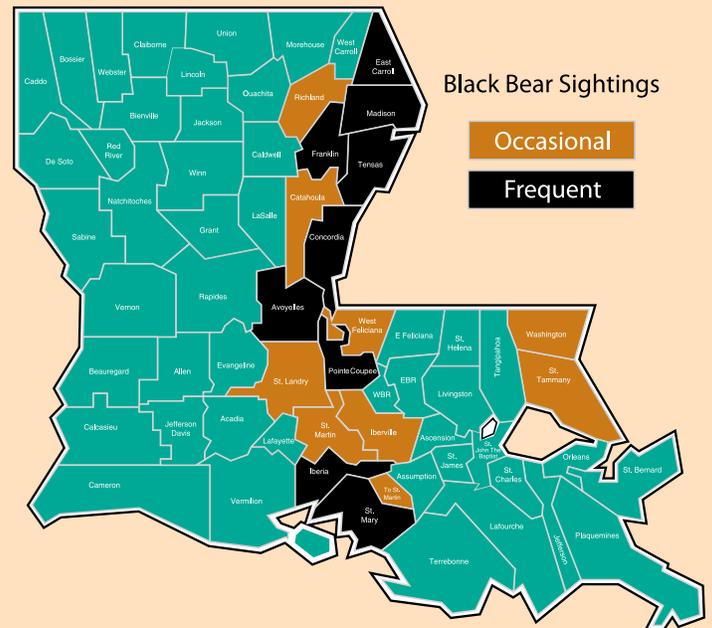
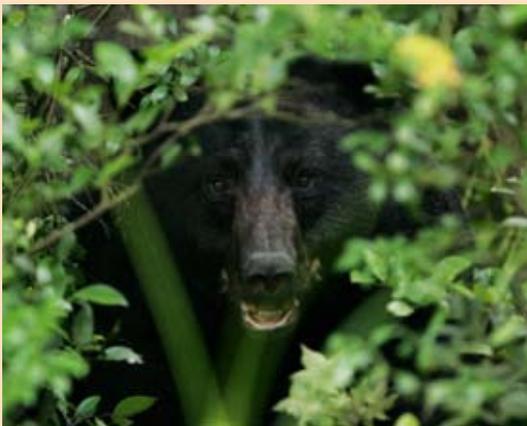
Route 2, Box 295
Tallulah, LA 71282
318-574-2664

Contributing Agencies:

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Louisiana Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit

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Parishes with frequent sightings:

Avoyelles, Concordia, East Carroll, Franklin, Iberia, Madison, Pointe Coupee, St. Mary and Tensas

Parishes with occasional sightings:

Catahoula, Iberville, Richland, St. Landry, St. Martin, St. Tammany (Pearl River drainage), Washington and West Feliciana

AUTHOR

Donald P. Reed, Ph.D.
Professor (Forestry/Wildlife)
Bob R. Jones - Idlewild Research Station



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