

## Bears in Colorado

As spring is making an arrival here in Western Colorado, the bears are beginning to wake from their long winter's nap. I thought this would be a good time to write something about the Colorado Black Bear, as they make their appearance on the scene. Most people are deathly afraid of them and I suppose with a certain amount of good cause, but they are not near the attacking monster folks think they are.

### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

For the record, in all of North America, 61 people have been killed by black bears since 1900. The 750,000 bears in North America kill an average of less than one person a year, while one out of each 16,000 people commits murder each year. Seems to me the woods are a safe place to be.

Last summer was a busy year for bear attacks in Colorado. In July, a 19-year-old camp counselor was dragged from his tent while sleeping. A black bear grabbed him by the skull and drug him an estimated 12 feet before he was able to fight free. The young man suffered some serious injuries but made a full recovery.

July of 2017 was an exceptionally busy time for bear encounters here in our state. On July 5, Colorado Parks and Wildlife reported four black bears had been killed in one day. Two of the bears were killed by homeowners after they came into their homes, while two others were killed by state officers after killing livestock.

A study from Colorado Parks and Wildlife shows that from 1960 through 2011 there was 24 bear attacks in Colorado with three resulting in death. Since 2000 there have only been 29 fatalities from bear attacks in North America. 17 of them were from black bear and 10 from grizzlies. Considering the number of people that take to the woods, a bear attack is a pretty rare occurrence.

This does not mean that you should be careless while out in bear country. As man encroaches deeper and deeper into the bear's territory, more encounters are happening. This encroachment of man into his territory may be part of the reason attacks seem to have risen in recent years.

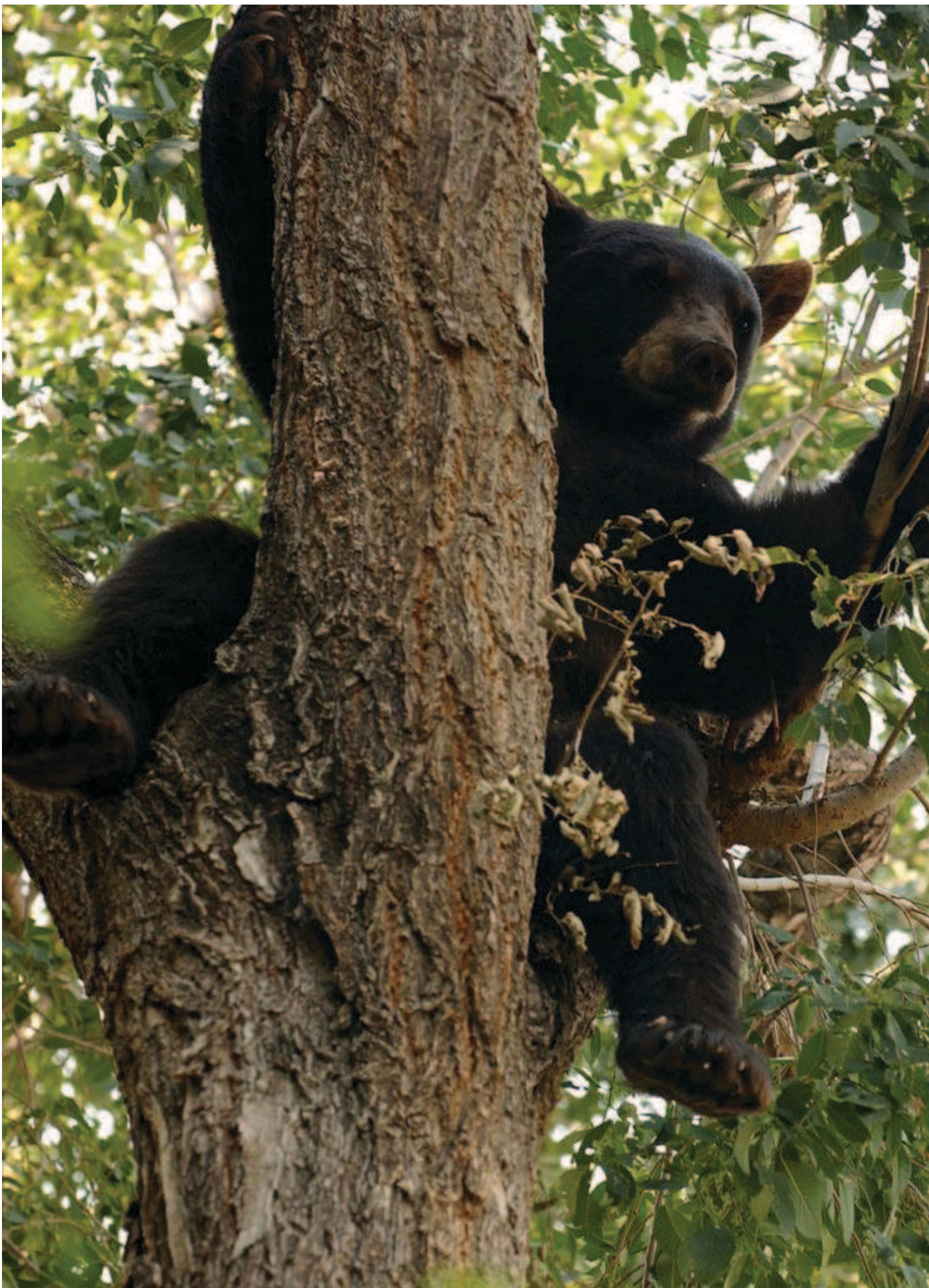
Here we will discuss a few things to make sure you are safe while in bear country. Bears are attracted to foods, beverages, gum, and sunscreen or just about anything with an odor. Their nose is 100 times more sensitive than a human's and can smell food for up to 5 miles away. Because of this, it is important to keep a clean camp.

I can't stress the clean camp enough. I have seen camps in such a state; it would make a garbage grinder gag. Bears are attracted to food and common sense dictates securing that food and properly stowing away your garbage.

A clean camp means storing all food, beverages and just about anything with a scent, in airtight containers. Coolers and boxes of food should never be stored in your tent or anywhere a bear can see, smell or reach. Trash should be double bagged and locked in your trunk or camper, never a tent. It is even a good idea to not sleep in the clothes that you cooked dinner wearing as a bear's nose is that sensitive.

If a bear should enter your camp, try to chase it away by yelling or tossing small stones in the direction of the bear. You can bang pots, blow the car horn or use a whistle. Just be certain that the bear has an escape route out of camp.

While you are out hiking around, keep an eye out for bear tracks, scat



Black bears are a large animal and can be very intimidating to see. Here are a few tips for seeing a bear safely. (Courtesy photo by Colorado Parks and Wildlife)

and shredded logs. Any of these are signs that one is in the area. Your normal talking is usually enough to have bears avoid you. Bears will usually hear or smell your presence and leave the area long before you see them.

Keep your dogs leashed at all times while outdoors, as you don't want them to chase or otherwise provoke a bear. I have Jack Russells who think they are bigger than a bear, and would go after one if they had a chance. I never said they were exceptionally bright in that area, so we keep them leashed and close at hand.

Children should be kept between adults while hiking. Don't let them fall behind or run up ahead of the group. Spend some time teaching the kids what to do if they see a bear.

When you see a bear on the trail, stand still and stay calm. If he is standing on his hind legs, he is just trying to see and identify you. Most bears stand up to see; it is not an aggressive move. Talk in a normal tone

of voice and be sure that there is an escape route for the bear.

Should you see cubs, immediately back out of the area, as the mother will be close by. A mother bear with cubs is another story — a very dangerous situation. Never allow yourself to come between the mother and cubs, as she will defend them viciously. This is one time a bear will attack.

If the bear does not leave, wave your arms slowly overhead and talk calmly. When the bear huffs, pops its jaw or stomps its feet, it wants you to give him space. Step off the trail to the downhill side and slowly back away until the bear is out of site.

A bear that approaches a person could be food conditioned and looking for a handout. Very rarely are they aggressive. Stand your ground, yell and throw rocks in the direction of the bear. People should NEVER feed bears. Doing so is just setting up the bear to have to be euthanized because it loses the fear of humans.

In the very rare event you are attacked by a bear, never play dead. Fight back with the bear with everything you have. People have been known to successfully fend off a bear attack with sticks, poles, a knife and even bare hands.

If you are fortunate enough to see a bear while outdoors, enjoy and watch from a safe distance. Remember, under no circumstances whatsoever, should you feed or attempt to feed a bear. If your presence causes the bear to look up or changes its behavior in any way, you are too close. A bear is a remarkable and beautiful creature. Enjoy bears safely and from a distance.

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### Have you ever heard the phrase...

...something is "beyond the pale?" Did you know that phrase came from the 14th century and referred to an area in Ireland that marked the geographic edge of English rule in that country? A fence made of stakes was erected and went on for miles. The Latin word for stake is "palus", hence the wild, uncontrolled land and its Irish inhabitants beyond the fence were known as "beyond the Pale". Nowadays, it refers to unacceptable behavior. Funny how a phrase can change from its original meaning and still be used...700 years later.

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