

# The Black Bear and You



PARC DE LA GATINEAU  
GATINEAU PARK



## THE BLACK BEAR

An estimated 800,000 black bears (*Ursus americanus*) live in North America, approximately 70,000 of them in Quebec's forests, which include the forests of Gatineau Park.

Normally, black bears flee humans. However, when food is scarce they are more likely to approach humans, particularly if they detect easily obtainable food, or if they are used to the presence of humans.

## PREVENTION

By taking a few simple precautions, you can reduce the risk of meeting a black bear — which often only wants to avoid humans.

- Travel in groups.
- Do not feed the animals.
- Make noise when walking in the forest.
- Avoid attracting bears with the smell of food.
- Never approach a bear; keep your distance (100 metres or about 330 feet).
- Leave the area if you see signs that bears are nearby (such as excrement, logs torn to pieces, overturned rocks, etc.).

## Camping:

- Keep food away from animals. To do this, suspend food from a tree, at least three metres (about 10 feet) above the ground and one metre (about three feet) from the tree trunk. You can also store food in a vehicle.
- Do not leave garbage or leftover food near the campsite.
- Do not eat or keep food or cosmetic products inside the tent.
- Clean dishes promptly.

## THE BLACK BEAR'S BEHAVIOUR WILL INFORM YOU OF ITS INTENTIONS

Black bears sometimes stand up on their back paws to see better. They also lift their noses to smell better. These behaviours, even if they are accompanied by low growling, are not signs of aggression.

However, chattering of teeth or loud blowing should be considered warnings. If the black bear hits the ground or hits objects with its paws, or if it looks like it's going to charge, it is clearly showing that it does not want you on its territory.

## WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU MEET A BLACK BEAR?

Although they are not normally aggressive, black bears are still wild animals. If you happen to meet one, do not try to approach it. Calmly back up, without running, while keeping an eye on the bear. Let it know that you are there by making noise or by talking in a calm, steady voice. Do not be aggressive. The black bear must not feel attacked. If there are young children with you, take them in your arms. Try to look bigger than you really are — for example, by lifting up your arms and grouping together if there are several people.

If the bear follows you, drop some things to distract it. If it continues to follow or seems aggressive, try to scare it off while you move away — without losing visual contact. Make large movements with what you have handy. Yell and make noise. Your goal is to impress the bear.

You must always make sure the black bear can move away. It must not feel caught or trapped. As well, you should not get between a female and her young. Even though they are not normally aggressive, female bears are protective of their young.

If you see a black bear in a campground or near human installations, stay calm. If necessary, find shelter in a building or vehicle, and try to scare off the bear by making noise.

## IF THE BLACK BEAR ATTACKS

It is extremely rare for black bears to attack humans. In fact, the probability of being hit by lightning is greater than that of being attacked by a black bear. If a black bear does attack:

- **Do not play dead:** This technique may work if you're facing a grizzly bear, but it probably won't work with a black bear.
- **Defend yourself:** Struggle, yell, hit the bear with a stone, a stick or a paddle. An energetic and vigorous defence increases your chances of making the black bear leave.

## CONCLUSION

The forest is the black bear's home. To stay safe while in the forest, be informed and act prudently.

Please report any bears displaying abnormal behaviour to **Gatineau Park** at (819) 827-2020. Thank you for your cooperation.

