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What do you do if you encounter a bear?

Excerpts from *Living in Bear Country* © Linda Masterson, 2006

If you do meet a black bear, it will most likely turn tail and run off. If it doesn't, you should stop, stand still and stay calm.

Talk to the bear in a normal, calm voice, in as much of a monotone as you can master. You can say anything you want, as there is no evidence that bears can understand English. "Hey bear, hey bear, we're here and we're getting out of your way now," is easy enough to remember! If you are in a group, only one person should be the "bear talker" as several people talking will likely sound contentious to a bear, no matter what you're saying.

Don't approach any closer, and don't whip out your camera and start taking pictures. It's important not to make any sudden or abrupt movements. Let the bear see you are a human and mean no harm, by slowly waving your arms and continuing to talk in a low, firm monotone voice.

Don't offer the bear any food.

Avoid direct eye contact. Bears and many other animals may view this as hostile or aggressive behavior. If the bear stands up, he is only trying to see you better to figure out what you are and assess whether or not you are a threat.

Don't run. Running triggers a chase response in many animals, including bears. Remember, bears can sprint at speeds of up to 30 mph. You can't outrun a bear. If the bear paws the ground, huffs and puffs, clacks and snorts, or runs directly at you, he's doing what is called a "bluff charge" to try to scare you off. If you stand your ground, the bear will probably stop a few feet from you and turn the other direction and run away. No matter what happens, do not run. If the bear gets back to where he started from, you can continue slowly backing away, talking and waving your arms. He may bluff charge you several times until he is comfortable turning his back on you and leaving.

Don't climb a tree. Adult black bears can climb a 100-foot tree in less than 30 seconds. Mother black bears often send their cubs up a tree when they sense danger. You don't want to end up a tree with a couple of cubs and mama bear waiting patiently below for you all to come down! If the bear is sufficiently interested in you, you'll just end up fending off a bear in a tree. When a dominant bear chases another bear up a tree in a battle of "who's turf is this, anyway?" the treed bear often gets yanked to the ground and pummeled a few times to teach it a lesson. Bears survive being pummeled by other bears a lot

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benefit of people.

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better than people do. Don't climb trees to escape a black bear.

Don't 'play dead', and don't turn your back on the bear. Back away and be prepared to stop and hold your ground if your movement away seems to irritate instead of calm the bear. Clacking teeth, popping noises, moaning, woofing or barking sounds are all vocal cues that mean the bear is as uncomfortable with the situation as you are. They are not indications of aggressive intent or an imminent attack. Truly aggressive black bears are eerily silent.

If a Black bear attacks you: Fight back. Even if you don't have bear repellent spray, people have successfully fended off black bear attacks using their bare hands, rocks, backpacks, and even water bottles!

Our mission: Managing fish and wildlife resources for their long-term well-being and the benefit of people.



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Farris Bryant Building • 620 S. Meridian St. • Tallahassee, FL
32399-1600 • 850-488-4676

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