

Safety Note #84

FIELDWORK SAFETY: BEARS



Bears inhabit throughout California's mountainous regions, usually above the elevation of 3,000 feet. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife estimates a population of 40,000 wild bears in the state. The bear is not on the endangered species list and has been classified as a game mammal since 1948. The last known fatal wild bear attack was in 1986, and although the chances of being attacked by a bear is highly unlikely, it is important to take precautions and study the recommended actions to prevent attacks.

When you are being outdoors:

- Avoid performing fieldwork that involves walking or hiking alone. Work with a partner in the areas where bears may be active.
- Use bear-proof containers by keeping any food, drinks, or pet food in bear-resistant food canisters or storage lockers and putting trash, recycling, and compost in secure bins.
- Remove any unsecured food, pet food, toiletries, or other strongly scented items from your vehicle, tent, or other enclosed spaces.
- Keep doors and windows closed and locked when the leaving a structure unoccupied.
- Bring pets inside, especially at night. Keep livestock in secure pens in the evening.
- Never feed or approach a bear, especially a sow with cubs or cubs alone.

When you encounter a bear:

- If the bear does not see you or attempts to approach you, let the bear know your presence by making noise, such as yelling, clapping hands, using noisemakers, or blowing whistles.
- Keep a safe distance and back away slowly and do not approach or confront the bear.
- Make yourself look bigger by lifting and waving arms or opening your jacket.
- DO NOT RUN, as you cannot outrun a bear. Do not make eye contact and let the bear leave on its own.
- If bear makes contact by attacking you, fight back by using any weapons you can find, including striking the bear with branches, rocks, or other objects. Concentrate on the bear's face, eyes, and/or nose.
- Carry a bear spray and know how to use it properly.
- Do not climb a tree to avoid bears, as bears are capable of climbing trees.
- Go to a safe place and call 911 if the bear is inside a home or structure.

Information source: <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Keep-Me-Wild/Bear>