

Safety Note #84

## FIELDWORK SAFETY: BLACK BEARS



Photograph Courtesy of DFG

Black bears occur throughout California mountainous regions, usually above an elevation of 3,000 feet. The California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) estimates a population of 30,000 black bears in the state. DFG has recorded only 12 “bear attacks” since 1980. The black bear is not on the endangered species list and has been classified as a game mammal since 1948. The last known Grizzly bear in California was killed in 1922 by a Fresno County rancher.

The following fieldwork precautions and actions are recommended by DFG to prevent and repel black bear attacks:

- Avoid performing fieldwork that involves walking or hiking alone. Work with a partner in black bear country.
- Never approach or corner a black bear, particularly a sow with one or more cubs, and always give the bear (and cubs) plenty of room to escape.
- Never put yourself between a mother bear and her cubs.
- If a cub is observed alone, immediately leave the area because it is very likely that the mother bear is close by.
- Do not run from a black bear because you cannot outrun the bear. Make eye contact and stand and face the animal.
- Upon encountering a black bear that does not flee, attempt to appear larger than you are by raising your arms and opening your jacket. Throw stones, branches or other items without turning your back. Wave your arms and yell at the bear.
- If attacked, fight back by using whatever weapons you can find, including striking the bear with branches or other objects. Concentrate on striking the bear’s face, eyes, and/or nose
- Throw something onto the ground (like a camera) if the bear pursues you, as it may be distracted by this and allow you to escape.
- Climbing a tree to avoid bears is popular advice but not very practical in many circumstances. All black bears can climb trees. Running to a tree may provoke an otherwise uncertain bear to chase you.
- If spotted by a bear, try to get its attention while it is a good distance away. Help the bear to recognize that you are human, by talking to it in a normal voice or waving your arms. If a bear cannot tell what you are, it may come closer or stand on its hind legs to get a better look or smell. A standing bear is usually curious, not threatening.

*Information Source: DFG at <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/hunting/bear/publicsafety/html>*