



# Volunteers In Parks

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## Living With Wildlife

By Meg Toom

Living, working and recreating in wildlife country can come with a few challenges. While many people enjoy seeing wildlife, there is an increased potential for human-wildlife conflict when we allow wildlife to find food, water or shelter within our properties and campsites. It's important for our safety and well-being, as well as for the conservation of wildlife, to ensure our neighborhoods and campgrounds are not attracting potentially dangerous wildlife.

Wild animals are born with a healthy fear of humans. Bears can lose that natural fear and become "human habituated" or used to human activity in a fairly short period of time. They learn from every experience, and if the encounters are positive ones for them, in that they receive a food reward like garbage, they soon learn that being around humans is okay. Even though they are wild animals, they will tolerate and adapt to human activity because they know the rewards are worth the risk.

Bear claw marks. Photos Meg Toom



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Bears have an acute sense of smell and are opportunistic by nature; once they find a food source they will return time and again, until the food source is removed.

Bears must consume a tremendous number of calories to store enough fat to survive hibernation. In preparation for hibernation, bear activity will increase in the fall as they seek food sources outside of their normal home range, and spend more time foraging. They don't hibernate because it's cold but instead because their natural food sources are no longer available, i.e. berries, clover, larvae. If they find non-natural food, such as garbage, they may not hibernate and will continue to seek out food.

We can reduce the potential for human-wildlife conflict by managing the human-generated food sources that attract them into our communities. We must manage our wildlife attractants; it is an offense under the *BC Wildlife Act* to intentionally or unintentionally feed dangerous wildlife.

Cougars are elusive animals that present a higher human safety concern. Being very territorial, they will not share home ranges, and young cougars must strike out on their own to find suitable territory. Oftentimes these young cougars haven't quite honed their hunting skills and may hunt domestic pets or livestock because these are easier prey. We inadvertently create food chains in our neighborhoods when we encourage natural prey like deer to forage in our yards. Feeding birds or pets can attract rodents, raccoons and other natural prey, which in turn attracts opportunistic cougars. The bottom line is we don't want our neighbourhoods to become suitable hunting grounds for cougars.

For wildlife encounters call the 24/7 Conservation Officer Service hotline at: 1.877.952.7277.



Cougar claw marks (above) and paw print (below)



Bear scat (left) and cougar scat (right)

## Tips to Reduce Human-Wildlife Conflict

### At home

Do not attract or feed wildlife. Deer, raccoons, rats and rabbits are natural prey.

Secure garbage always. Only place garbage curbside on the day of collection, never the night before. Freeze smelly items and place in garbage on the morning of collection.

Keep pet food inside. Keep barbeques clean.

Ensure birdseed is not attracting rodents.

Roaming pets are easy prey. If pets are to stay outside at night, ensure their enclosure is fully fenced and has a secure roof.

Manage and harvest fruit trees or use a portable electric fence. Don't let fruit accumulate on the ground.

### On the trails

Be alert and aware. Look for signs of fresh activity i.e. claw marks on trees, scat, paw prints, ripped apart logs.

Avoid surprise encounters by making noise: use your voice. Riding/running quickly and quietly increases your risk for surprise encounters. Use caution and make noise especially around blind

corners or near running water.

Hike or bike in groups, keep children close by.

Keep dogs leashed.

Avoid food caches: wildlife will often cover unconsumed kill with branches, dirt or leaves, so if you see a food cache, leave the area immediately. Be alert to circling ravens or turkey vultures - they may be indicating a kill or food cache is in the area.

Carry bear spray and know how to use it.

### Bear encounters

Do NOT run. Never turn your back on wildlife.

Talk calmly and back away slowly.

Avoid eye contact.

Carry bear spray and know how to use it.

### Cougar encounters

Do NOT run. Never turn your back on wildlife.

Pick up children. Back away slowly.

Use a confident, loud voice. Maintain eye contact.

Make yourself appear large and threatening.

Throw objects if the cougar approaches and have your bear spray ready.

If attacked, fight back.

*(References: District of Squamish & Ministry of Environment)*