

Good advice when you move in bear areas

The Scandinavian brown bear behaves shyly when encountering humans. Good sense of hearing and a good sense of smell helps it avoid places where it could encounter humans. If you want to be sure not to encounter a bear, you should speak loud or sing a little. If you, against all odds, still would meet a bear it is good to be prepared and know how to behave.

In the following leaflet you can find some advice that may help you to avoid a bear encounter and what to do if you happen to encounter a bear, especially when you stand face to face with the bear.



Is the brown bear dangerous?

If you want to know more about the behaviour of brown bear during encounters with humans, you can read the book **Is the brown bear dangerous?** It contains results of the research of the Scandinavian Brown Bear Project. You can download it from: www.viltskadecenter.se.



Viltskadecenter
www.viltskadecenter.se
Tel 0581-920 70



Tryck: Centrumtryck Mora AB, 2009.

Facts about bears

In Sweden there are approximately 3000 bears (2009), distributed over two thirds of the country's area: from the very north of the province Norrland to the northern part of the province Svealand. For about six months every year, from November until April, bears hibernate in a den. Most of them dig their den in an old overgrown anthill, a few hibernate under a big rock, in a crevice or dig a hole in the ground. In January, two, sometimes three cubs are born in the den, weighing about 500 grams. They usually stay for a year with the mother, sometimes, especially further north they stay with the mother for an extra year. When they leave the den for the first time in April, the cubs weigh around 2-4 kg. Until the next winter, their weight rises up to 50 kg. An adult female can weigh up to 150 kg, whereas the males are remarkably bigger and heavier – they can weigh up to 300 kg.

The size of different individuals can vary very much. During hibernation a bear loses about one third of its body weight.

Just like us humans, bears are omnivores with a very variable diet. Their choice of food depends on the season: they eat what is most easily available. In spring they eat mostly ants, carcasses and grass, in summer they also eat moose calves and herbs, whereas in autumn berries are the predominating food with blueberries and crowberries as the most important species. During this time, a bear is capable of eating one third of its bodyweight in berries per day. Berries are the most important food for bears as they provide nearly half of their annual energy needs.

Bears are solitary animals living in home ranges which overlap each other partially. Adult bears meet only during the mating season in May/June. The home range of an adult female measures about 500 square kilometres, while females with cubs take up only half of that area. Home ranges of male bears are three times bigger, measuring 1500 square kilometres.

The bears sense of smell is very well developed, it also has a very keen sense of hearing. Its eyesight is relatively poor.

Tracks and sounds



The footprints of bears have five claws. The front paw is short and broad, while the hind paw is similar to human footprints. It is very hard to estimate a bear's size by its footprints. If the front paw is less than 7 cm across, it indicates a cub born in the same year. A female's front paw is up to 13,5 cm wide, a males up to 17 cm.

It is uncommon to hear any noises from bears. Mother and cubs communicate with noises, particularly when the cubs beg for milk or when the mother warns them of danger, so that they can climb up a tree to safety. Bears roar when fighting, when being aggressive towards humans and when they are injured.

If you encounter a bear



Photo: Anders Björklund, Orsa

1 *If you see a bear from your car...*

Remain in the car. Do not go out to take photos. Do not try to touch a sweet tumbling bear cub if you see one on the side of the road. The mother has strong protection instincts and she is not far away.

2 *What to do with garbage and leftovers...*

Avoid leaving leftovers around camping areas or other places. The bear has a well developed sense of smell and a good memory. A bear often comes back to a location where it has found food. The same with garbage – even in closed plastic containers – it sends out smells and a bear might not be able to resist. Please keep in mind to pack away all your garbage. It is important to maintain the bears natural shyness. They must not associate the chance of a tasty meal with the smell of humans.

3 *If you are in a bear area during early summer...*

The mating season for bears is between May and June. During this time bears are very active, even during the day. The risk of running into a bear is high at this time of the year. Young males looking out for females walk long distances during the day. The yearlings have just separated from their mother and are exploring the wilderness for the first time on their own. These youngsters can be very curious and are not afraid of humans. You should make them notice you by talking loudly and then leaving the area slowly.

4 *When you are out to pick berries...*

Half of the annual diet of the brown bear consists of berries, especially blue berries. During the berry picking season most bears are occupied by eating a large quantity of berries to accumulate fat for the winter. Berry pickers should always be aware of the risk of encountering a bear in places with lots of berries. Bears do not defend territories, especially a berry rich site. Generally the bear has already left the place you are approaching, because its sense of smell and its sense of hearing have warned it in time. However, if you meet a bear, make your presence known by talking and leave the area slowly.

5 *When you see a bear resting or eating a carcass...*



Photo: Anders Björklund, Orsa

Stay calm. Show the bear that you did not come to steal his food. Raise to your full height and make your presence known by speaking loudly. Retire slowly and carefully the way you came – but never run away!

6 *When you find a cub in your way...*

Never try to take photos or make contact. Stay away from wild bears! Keep in mind that its mother is probably just around the corner. Turn around and leave the place the way you came.

7 *When you are out walking with your dog in a bear area...*

Keep your dog on a leash. A free running dog increases the risk of a bear encounter. An unskilled dog can, after having discovered the bear, rush directly to the owner to seek protection. The bear will see the owner as a danger, even if it was the dog who provoked the bear.

8 *When you encounter a bear whilst hunting...*

A hunter sitting in his position or sneaking around in the forest faces a higher risk of encountering a bear. If the bear has not noticed you, you should clap your hands or make some noises. A shot in the air might also be helpful. Never shoot at the bear. Almost all accidents with bears happen with wounded animals. A wounded bear is very dangerous. You should also know that a bear standing on its hind legs is not aggressive. It is just standing upright to survey the surroundings to confirm what its good sense of smell and sharp hearing already have informed him about.

9 *If a bear approaches you...*

The bear is provoked by your approach. The following descriptions are the most common explanations for this type of behaviour: It is a female with cubs. It is a bear with a carcass nearby. The bear could not hide himself in a safe place because you appeared suddenly. It might be a bear who has just woken up in his winter den and is just coming out. Last but not least it could have been your dog who has tracked the bear. A provoked bear might attack you. Commonly it is just a fake. You should signal as soon as possible your peaceful intentions. Stand still, talk loud and don't make any threatening gestures. Leave the place slowly – don't run.

10 *If it does not help and the bear attacks...*

Make a last effort to distract the bear. Put something in front of you, your berry pail or your fishing equipment. If this does not help, lay down on the ground in the foetal position or on your stomach. Put your hands around your neck and protect your head. Pretend you are dead. You appear less threatening to the bear by making yourself as small as possible and behaving as passively as possible.