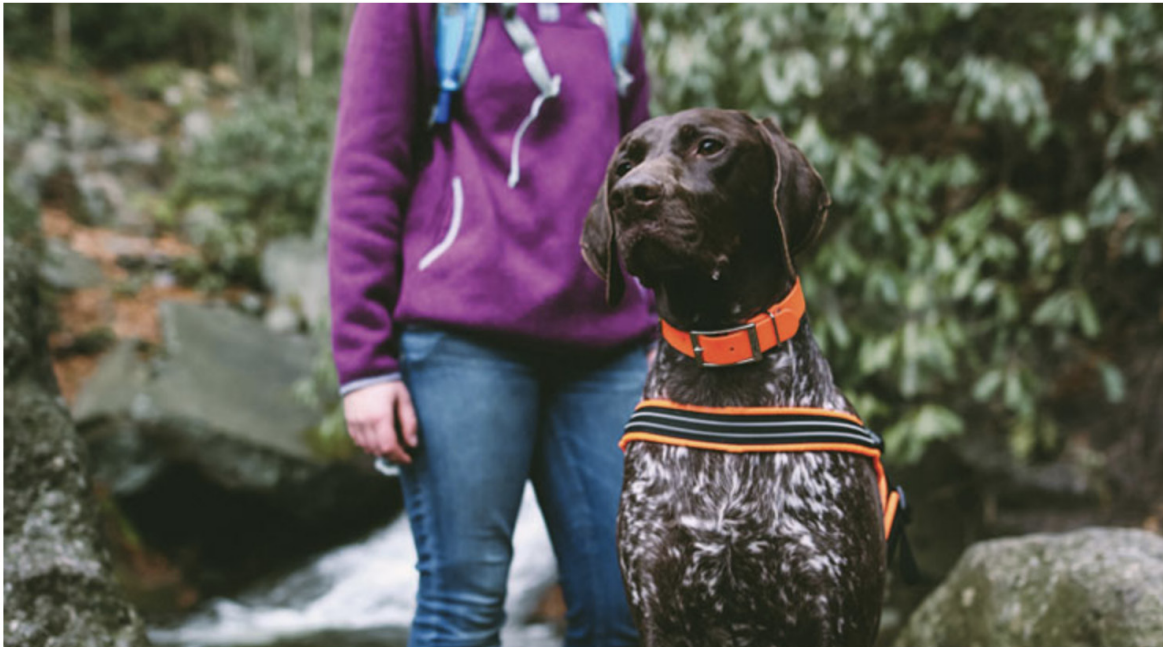


WHAT TO DO IN A BEAR ENCOUNTER WITH YOUR DOG



The best kind of encounter between a bear and a dog is no encounter at all. The single biggest problem for a bear—in his territory and in your own back yard—is an unleashed dog. However well trained the dog, or however well he responds to you in a normal situation, it's not enough in most emergencies involving a bear. And while bear attacks are unlikely and rare, a three-year study of 92 attacks in North America showed fully half of them involved a dog off leash.

Will a dog attract or detract bears? The short answer is, yes. A dog can smell a bear and alert you well in advance that something's there, which could in turn divert a potential encounter. And a barking dog can discourage a bear from investigating a campsite. But a dog who takes off into the woods after a bear can lead it back to the trail or to your campsite, where it can redirect its hostility on you or other members of your party. The bottom line: an unleashed dog in bear country increases the chances of an avoidable bear encounter.

Read on to learn what to do if you and your cherished canine see a bear and, better still, how to avoid a bear encounter in the first place.

DOG AND BEAR ENCOUNTER: WHAT TO DO

Sometimes an encounter with a bear is unavoidable despite your best efforts to sidestep it. **If your off-leash dog charged a bear who decides to retaliate your only recourse is bear spray.** But assuming you're still in control of the dog and the situation has not escalated:

1. **If the bear has not seen you:** Quietly and quickly leave the area, but never run—you'll look like prey. A bear can run faster than 30 mph—it will easily outrun, outclimb, and outswim you.
2. **If the bear has seen you:** Keep your dog close and calm if the bear stays 15 feet or more away, avoiding sudden movements. Respect the bear's critical space, do not approach it, and try to turn and leave how you came. If you must continue, take a detour and give the bear plenty of space.
3. **If the bear's behavior changes:** You're too close, so back away—give him all the room he wants. Speak: use a normal tone of voice and move your arms.
4. **If you have an encounter at close range:** Stand upright and make yourself as large as possible. Don't make direct eye contact—speak in a calm, assertive, and assuring tone as you attempt to slowly back up and get your dog and yourself out of danger.
5. **If the bear moves toward you:** Wave your arms and make a lot of noise—most bears will back off quickly. Throw an object on the ground (your camera, for example), as the bear may investigate it long enough for you to escape. But never toss food towards a bear or attempt to feed it.
6. **Give the bear a way out:** leave an escape route open for him.
7. **If the bear charges:** If you know the bear has an escape route AND you are sure it's a black bear, stand tall and look it directly in the eye: yell at the bear and tell it to leave—make sure your bear spray is at the ready. **Never** use this strategy with a grizzly bear; you will need to use your bear spray instead.

FACTS ABOUT BEAR BEHAVIOR: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Most bears are wary of humans and close encounters with them are rare. Rarer still are bear attacks—a lightning strike is more likely to kill you than a bear. When bears do attack they are usually defending cubs or a food source; these attacks are avoidable and typically involve only minor injuries. Offensive black bear attacks are extremely rare and usually occur in remote areas where bears have very little exposure to people.

Quick Tip: Respect a mama bear—never come between her and her cubs.

Still, forewarned is forearmed: possessing a better understanding of bears and how they behave before you reach the trailhead to hike with your dog will help you know what to do should you encounter a bear.

- Bears are shy and retiring: they'd rather avoid interaction with humans and dogs and will not engage unless provoked. But while an adult bear is not likely to approach a human, her curious cubs might, invoking a potentially dangerous encounter.
- Bears are more active at dawn and dusk but can be seen any time of day or night.
- Bears will defend a food source: this may include a cache of berries, fish, or carrion (dead animals).

Quick Tip: Bears' habituation to people always centers on food sources. They will tolerate people or other bears at close range if they need access to food, whether it is salmon in a stream or garbage in a dumpster. Habituation puts people, dogs, and bears at risk.

- Bears react to new things first with fear, and then with curiosity, inspecting odors, noises, and objects to determine whether they are edible or potential playthings. Standing on the rear legs is a manifestation of a bear's curiosity, but people often misinterpret this as aggression.
- Bears do not like dogs in spite of a distant genetic link to them.
- Bears have a keener sense of smell than any other animal on the planet, 2,100 times better than ours.
- Bears don't like surprises, but are not always aware of what is happening around them when they're focused on something else, which in turn makes them vulnerable to surprise encounters.
- Bears may "bluff charge" when people come too close. This is their way of asking for more space, and is especially true of a female with cubs.
- Bears follow their prey, which makes bears versus dogs more dangerous than dogs versus other kinds of wildlife. When a dog runs a bear may chase.
- Black bears and grizzlies react differently when people or dogs enter their "critical space:"
 - While a black bear is capable of seriously maiming or killing a dog or human, s/he is more likely to run up a tree, or to run her cubs up a tree, to avoid an encounter.
 - Grizzlies are more likely to stand their ground and defend themselves; they are not good climbers.

BEAR COMMUNICATION – WHAT "LANGUAGE" TO WATCH FOR:

A defensive situation can occur with a mother bear and cubs, a bear defending a food source, or during a surprise encounter.

You can expect any of these behaviors:

- Jaw popping;
- Swatting the ground with the front paw;
- Blowing and snorting;
- Lunging or "bluff charging."

The bear does not want to fight—it is telling you to back off. Ready your bear spray, speak appeasingly, and slowly back away from the bear. Leave the area immediately.

HOW TO AVOID A BEAR ATTACK

Before you hike or run: Familiarize yourself with the wildlife in the area. Avoid running with your dog on trails notorious for wildlife encounters. Potential predators see running as provocative; it can stimulate a bear's predatory instinct to chase and attack.

Always carry bear spray, always carry a first aid kit for your dog when you take him hiking or camping with you, and always bring your cell phone.

Make noise: Let wildlife know you're there by talking and singing—this will help deter surprise encounters, especially near rushing water and where there are limited sight lines:

- Hike in a group if you can: your group will look bigger and more formidable to a bear.
- Wear bear bells on yourself and put them on your dog's collar; the bells will also help you hear your dog if he bounds off the trail into the woods.

Stay alert: Leave your phone in your pocket. Tune in to the noise around you instead; listen for approaching animals. Keep your eyes open for

- Tracks
- Scat (bear poop)
- Torn-up logs
- Scratched trees
- Overturned rocks
- Digs on the trail

These are all telltale signs of wildlife; ready your bear spray if you see any of them, and report any dead animals to the trail management.

Observe leash laws: Keep an unleashed dog close to you—when he is allowed to wander he may lead a potential predator back to you. And stay on established trails. Leash your dog if you notice any signs of wildlife in the area.

Go at the right time: Remember that bears are more active at dawn and dusk; stick to daytime hiking.

Avoid closed trails: Park staff may have marked them closed intentionally to protect visitors if there is bear or other wildlife activity in the area.

HOW TO USE BEAR SPRAY

Bear spray works by compromising a bear's ability to breathe, see clearly, and smell, giving you and your dog a window of opportunity to escape a close encounter or charge:

- Make sure you have bear spray and not pepper spray. If the spray contains less than 30 percent oleoresin capsicum, it is pepper spray for humans.
- Ready your spray if you see **any** signs of bear activity: tracks, poop, torn-up logs, scratched trees, overturned rocks, or evidence of digging on the trail.
- If you have no other choice to avoid an attack, use the bear spray: from a distance of 20 to 30 feet aim just below the bear's face and spray in a long blast—the cloud will rise and make its way into the bear's eyes and nose. As you slowly back away, continue to spray towards the bear in short bursts. The bear will most likely run in the other direction.

Wind, rain, temperature, and the proximity of the bear can all interfere with bear spray's effectiveness. Used properly, it is an effective deterrent that protects people, dogs, and bears.

Fully domesticated dogs have no place in the wilderness except closely supervised: unleashed dogs are responsible for many avoidable encounters with bears, and often provoke these confrontations into a much more dangerous situation than necessary. No dog, however large and muscle bound, is a sufficient match for a hungry or agitated bear. If you plan to hike or run in bear territory, the surest way to avoiding a bear encounter is to leave your dog safe and sound at home safe with a sitter. But if he is trail-worthy, keep him leashed and never be without a canister of bear spray.