

Black Bears in Castle Pines Village

Ursus americanus, the American black bear, has an image problem. It suffers from its inclusion in the grouping “North American bears”. When you’re included with grizzly bears, polar bears, and Kodiak bears, everyone assumes that you, too, are wildly aggressive and unpredictable. What most people don’t know is that black bears are only distantly related to their fierce relatives. They are naturally a shy, unaggressive animal that is fearful of humans and is happiest when eating acorns! Here are some fun facts which will help you better understand and appreciate our Castle Pines Village black bears:

- The American black bear is a solitary animal, except when breeding. They are our most common bear, with approximately 750,000 currently in North America. The home range of a female black bear is from 2 to 10 square miles, while the male’s range is from 10 to 50 square miles.
- Female black bears average 175 pounds, with males averaging 350. They average 3 feet in height on all fours, and from 5 to 7 feet standing.
- While often shiny black in color, a black bear’s fur can also be brown, cinnamon, blond, or a combination of the above, and can change in color as the bear ages.
- A black bear’s paws are broad and flat, with 5 toes and 5 claws. Its claws are shorter than those of the grizzly bear, and while they are often used for digging, they are more adapted for tree climbing. Their front paws average 6 inches in length, and their hind paws may well reach 7 inches.
- Black bears have dexterous lips and tongues. They can easily strip leaves and fruits from plants by sliding branches through a gap in their teeth.
- A black bear has a large brain compared to its body size, and is considered to be one of the more intelligent mammals.
- Black bears have an amazing sense of smell and are able to distinguish many scents over 20 miles away.
- A black bear’s hearing is at least twice as sensitive as a humans, and they exceed our frequency ranges. Their ears can be swiveled in several directions and are often flattened in aggressive situations. Black bears may tilt their ears forward when they are curious.
- The distance vision of a black bear is not well developed, however they have keen close vision and excellent night vision. Many people mistake a bear’s upright stance as a sign of aggression, when it often is only an attempt to see more clearly.
- Lean black bears can run over 30 miles per hour, but only for short stretches. They are excellent swimmers (and love fish!)
- A black bear does not growl. They do make grunting, humming, moaning and blowing sounds, and tongue and teeth clicks when they are afraid.
- A favorite local food of the black bear is Gambel Oak acorns. A single bear can eat several hundred in one day. The black bears’ diet consists of over 90% plant material: berries, nuts, grasses and forbs.
- Our bears that eat meat are often young adults that have gone into hibernation the previous year with low fat reserves. In order to survive in spring before grasses and forbs have grown to grazable size, these hungry bears may hunt young deer and elk that have been left alone while their mothers are off grazing. Black bears will also scavenge.
- Black bears are crepuscular, meaning they are most active during dawn and dusk, however they are known to feed at any time of day, especially as they gear up for hibernation. It is natural for bears to sleep during the day, however this cycle may change because of feeding requirements.

- In June or July, our bears will mate, and females give birth to from 1 to 5 cubs approximately 2 months before the end of hibernation. Black bears become sexually mature between ages 2 and 5, and females breed usually every other year. Cubs are weaned at near 7 months and will stay with their mother for approximately 18 months.
- Depending on weather, black bears usually go into hibernation between late October and mid November and awaken anywhere from mid-March to late April. If a recently awakened bear encounters sudden cold weather, it may temporarily go back into hibernation. Male bears usually awaken first, often up to two weeks before females. Male black bears and non-breeding females may also wake temporarily to eat during the winter. Black bears hibernate in rock caverns, excavated holes, in brush thickets and under shrubs and trees.
- A black bear's average lifespan is approximately 15 years, however they can easily live 20 to 25 years in the wild.

Here's how you can help our Castle Pines Village Bears:

Leave nothing edible outside, including pet food. Clean grills after use.

Discontinue feeding wild birds until we know what to expect from bears this spring. If you feel you must feed birds, hang feeders over 10 feet high and bring them inside at night. Feed only sunflower seed and thistle, as these seeds will be less apt to be raked to the ground. Suction cup feeders are available that can be attached to an upper story window. Remember that bears might try to climb anything below a feeder.

Keep lower level windows closed when cooking, and garage doors closed and doors locked; Bears can open doors with levered handles.

Do not leave food in cars and lock car doors; Bear can smell food inside cars and can open car doors.

Familiarize yourself with your trash schedule and put trash out as close as possible to pick-up time. Wash your recyclables and clean out bins with bleach or ammonia.

If you encounter a black bear, back away. Black bears seldom approach humans. If you feel you are in a safe spot, do what you can to respectfully shoo the bear away: Clap your hands; honk your horn; shout. As much as we love our black bears, you'll be doing the bear a favor to make it less comfortable close to humans.

Sunday, April 15, at 3:00 pm, in the CPHA Community Room, the Wildlife Committee is sponsoring a talk by our District Wildlife Manager for Colorado Parks and Wildlife on "Bears and Coyotes". Come with your questions, ready to learn!