

Living with Bears in Southern California



Bear Biology

Conflict Bear Management

Preventing Conflict

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Acknowledgement

Human-wildlife conflict is complex, contextual, and complicated

Attitudes, values, perceptions, and tolerance of wildlife varies widely

Community knowledge, identities, and traditions are interconnected with our natural resources

California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)

- Founded 1951 - formerly “Department of Fish and Game”
- **Regulatory, conservation-based, and management agency** for wildlife in CA – implement policy established by the Fish and Game Commission
- **Protect and maintain healthy wildlife populations** while overseeing their recreational, commercial, scientific, and educational use
- Lead agency charged with **human-wildlife conflict response**



Human-Wildlife Conflict Program

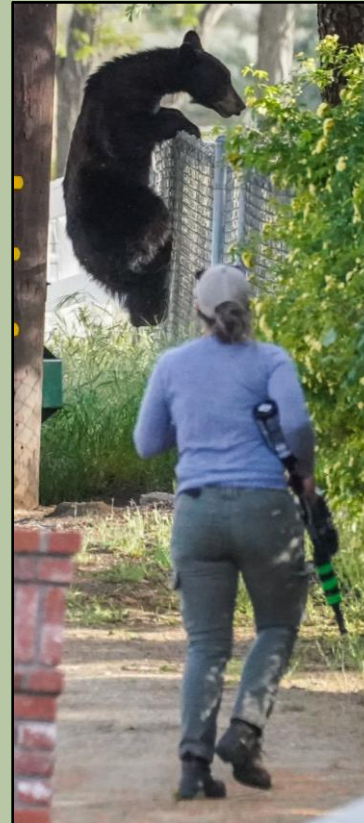
NEW

Created to help CDFW engage with communities experiencing conflicts:

- Raise awareness and appreciation of wildlife
- Proactively prevent conflicts
- Monitor and respond to conflicts
- Promote behaviors that encourage coexistence

Program tools and strategies include:

- Outreach, education, site visits, field response
- Use of non-lethal deterrents & aversive conditioning
- Monitor wildlife via telemetry & GPS technology




California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Home Fishing Hunting Licensing

Human-Wildlife Conflicts Toolkit

- Bats
- Beaver
- Birds
- ▾ Black Bear

The black bear (*Ursus americanus*) is the only bear species living in California today. The last documented sighting of a California grizzly was in 1924, but black bears continue to be misidentified as grizzlies due to their wide range of coat colorations (including blonde, brown, cinnamon, or black). The statewide black bear population is estimated to be between 30,000 and 40,000. Black bears occur in a diversity of habitats, including natural, rural, and residential areas.



- Black Bear Life History (PDF) [↗](#)
- Black Bear Range Map (PDF) [↗](#)
- Black Bear Management Program
- Bear Hunting and Regulations

Black bears provide many ecosystem benefits by serving as seed dispersers, scavengers, and predators. Bears are omnivores (eating meat and plants) and will consume nearly anything, including seeds, plants, berries, other animals, pet food, human food, and trash (if unsecured). Bears are intelligent and adaptable, and they can learn to associate particular places or situations with finding food. Black bears may cause concern due to property damage, loss of small livestock or pets, or public safety as they search for food, as they can become habituated to and lose their fear of humans.

Prevent Potential Conflicts:

- Conflicts Between Bears and Dogs (PDF) [↗](#) (BearWise)
- Attract Birds, Not Bears (PDF) [↗](#) (BearWise)
- Bear Safety Tips [↗](#) (BearWise)
- Detering Bears with Electrified Fencing: A Beginner's Guide [↗](#) (Interagency Collaboration)
- Black Bear Damage Prevention and Control Methods (PDF) [↗](#) (USDA-APHIS)
- Keep Tahoe Bears Wild [↗](#) (Interagency Collaboration)
- Deceased Domestic Animal Disposal Contact List (PDF) [↗](#) (CDFA) - possible wildlife attractant source
- Report Bear Incidents

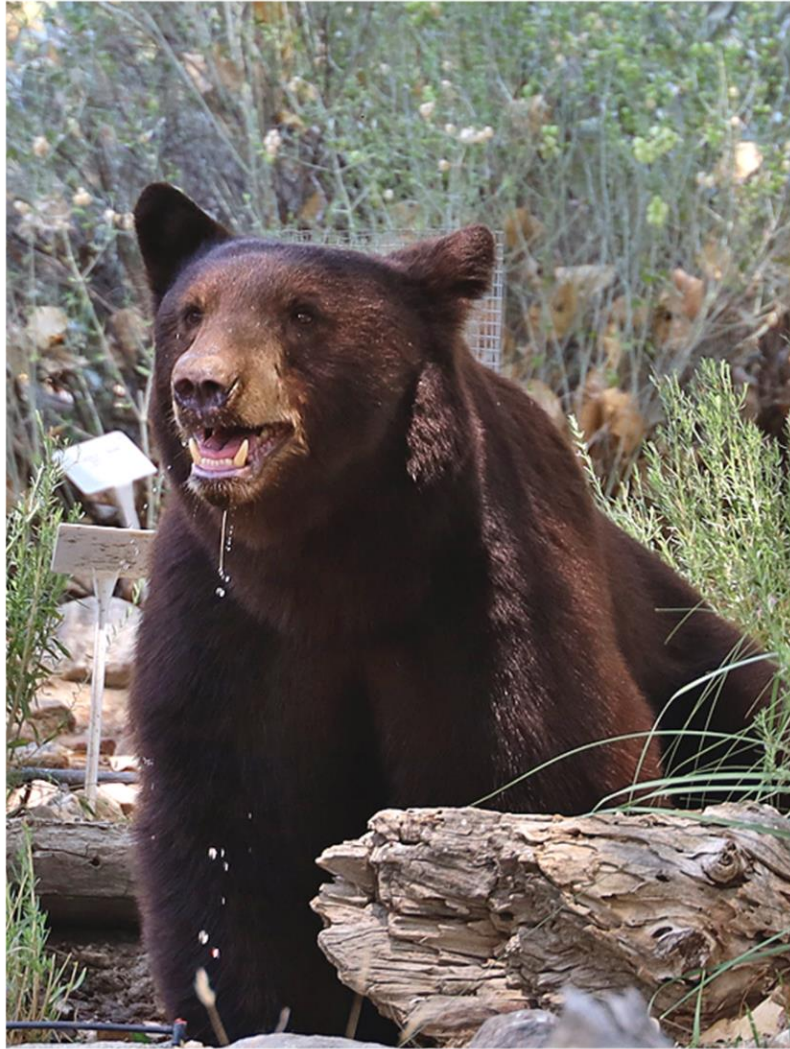
wildlife.ca.gov/HWC



Bear Biology

American Black Bear

Ursus americanus



© Joe Zarki



Typical Habitat

Mountainous/foothill areas above ~3,000 ft elevation



Adult Weight

Male : 150 - 350 lbs,
Female: 100 - 200 lbs



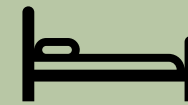
Home Range Size

60 - 150 sq miles



Diet

Omnivore - fruits, nuts, roots, grasses, insects, acorns, animal protein



Hibernation

Nov - March
– not all bears!



CA Population Estimate

30,000 - 40,000
Lifespan: 15 - 25 years



© Bastien



© neil_tsutsui



© Irene Domhoff

Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*)



© Irene Domhoff

© NatureMapping

Where Do Bears Live?

- **Recent History:** mountainous areas of northern CA only
- **Currently:** mountainous + foothill areas of nearly all CA
- **Complicated Southern CA History:**
 - Black bears appear in Southern CA fossil record nearly a million years ago
 - 2,000 year-long “megadrought” occurred - black bears likely retreated to wetter areas to the north
 - Forests returned after, but black bears had not yet
 - 1930’s “re-introduction” - 28 bears from Yosemite National Park between to ANF (22) and LPNF (6)



Bear Habitat





Bear Habitat ✓



Bear Habitat ?

The Thing About “Bear Country” Is...

- Wildlife don't recognize property lines or boundaries of what is “human territory”
- Four requirements for suitable habitat:
 - ✓ Food
 - ✓ Water
 - ✓ Shelter
 - ✓ Other individuals of your species
- “Human Country” and “Bear Country” can and do easily overlap – must address attractants



“There is no magic line between the wild and the urban.”

- Greg Pauly, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles

Reproduction



Breed: June – August; delayed implantation of eggs (more food = more cubs)

Rearing: Cubs born in winter den between January – February; emerge in spring

Cubs

- Litter size: 1 - 5 young (2 average)
- Weaned: 6 - 8 weeks
- Leave: ~ 1 ½ - 2 years

Dens

- In trees or under tree root systems, rock outcroppings, thick vegetation, logging slash or downed logs

Bear Senses



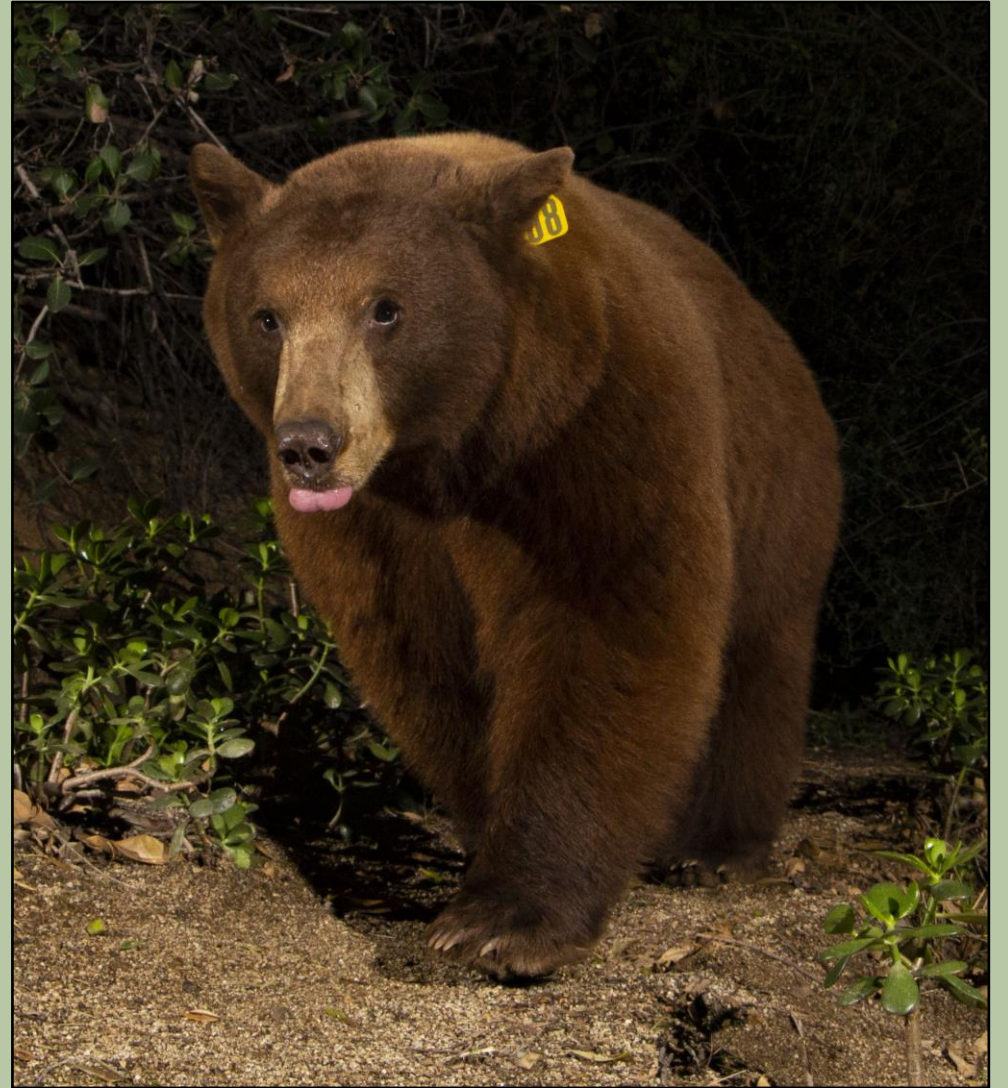
Sight = equal to humans



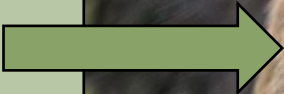
Hearing = excellent



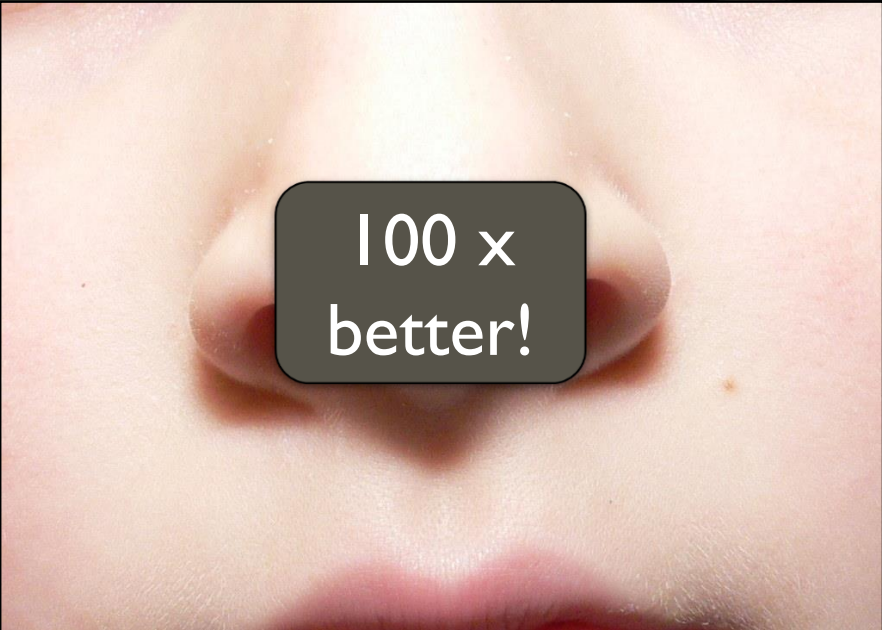
Smell = mind boggling!



Bear nose



© Alex Proimos



100 x better!

© Eric Horst



7 x better!

© Amy Powell

An Adaptable Diet

- **Rural:** fruits, nuts, roots, grasses, insects, acorns, carrion
- **Urban/suburban:** rural diet + trash, bird food, pet food, garden fruits/vegetables, compost, and other unsecured “human foods”
- Black bears are **opportunistic** - will eat whatever is available and easy to access



What is “Normal” Bear Behavior?

Normal

Ears and head raised
Sniffing the air
Standing up



Lightly Stressed

Stiffen in stance
Out of place yawn
Change in orientation



Moderately Stressed

Huffing or moaning
Popping of teeth
Head swinging back and forth



Highly Stressed

Rapid, vocal huffing
Open mouth “jawing”
Guttural noises
Swatting the ground
Bluff charging





Conflict Bear Management

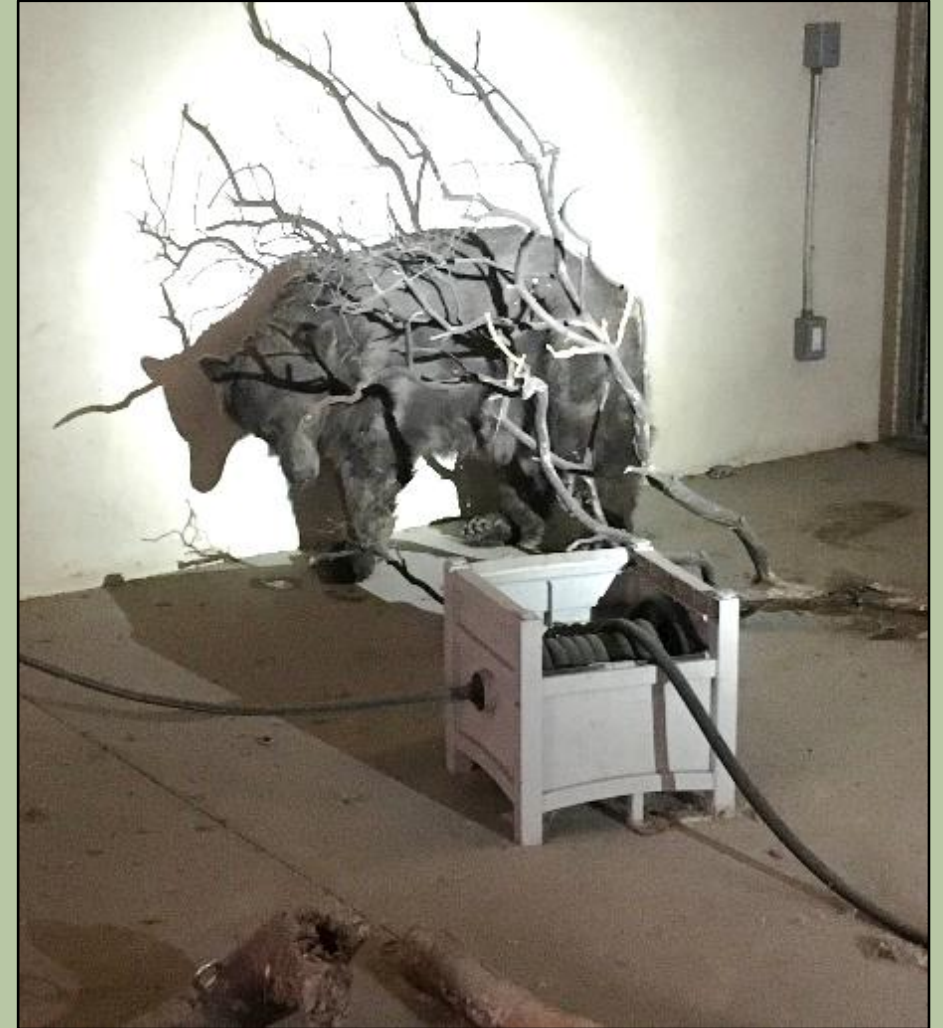
What Is A “Conflict” Bear?

- Bear requires some management action or response from, CDFW, law enforcement, or even the public, depending on behavior/situation
- “Conflict” types includes:
 - No-Harm, No-Foul
 - General Nuisance
 - Habituated
 - Depredation
 - Public Safety
- Bears typically avoid direct interactions with people - retain natural aversion to people, until they begin to associate humans and human-use areas with food (and/or water and shelter)



“No Harm/No Foul” Bear

- **Wrong place, wrong time**
 - “Food not confrontation”
 - Typically younger, juvenile bears
- Give space and time to leave
- Haze (or “scare” away)
- CDFW may move to nearest suitable habitat





“General Nuisance” and “Habituated” Bear

- Accessing attractants around people/using developed areas - but no extensive property damage or aggression directed towards a human
- Recommend removing/preventing access to attractants
- Recommend deterrents & hazing

“Depredation” Bear

- Threatening to, damaging, or actually destroying property
- Typical hazing may no longer be effective - recommend more advanced deterrents and hazing, increased attractant management
- Lethal permits can be requested and issued to a property owner by CDFW (where property owner “Takes” bear), but only:
 - After verified property damage or loss has occurred
 - If all other non-lethal options have been exhausted
 - All local firearm ordinances are followed



“Public Safety” Bear



© ventunadave

- Bear has made physical contact with a human, or is exhibiting an **immediate threat** to public health and safety
- **Immediate threat** = bear exhibits one or more aggressive behaviors directed toward a person
- **Only Law Enforcement personnel can determine immediate threat**
- Important to consider: people live and recreate in bear habitat every day without incident

Can CDFW Relocate the Bear?



The Problem(s) With Relocation/Translocation



- Bears can travel hundreds of miles to return to the same area they were moved from
- Moves the “conflict” somewhere else
- Opens space for other wildlife to take its place
- Potential to spread disease to other populations
- Become disoriented – stressful, potentially dangerous for animal during capture process
- Often, already near/within suitable habitat
- Does not fix the root of the problem: **food, water, shelter will continue to attract wildlife**



Preventing Conflicts

Never. Feed. Wildlife.

Intentionally...

... or unintentionally



Feeding is Against the Law



Cal. Code Regs. Tit. 14 Sec. 251

§251.1. Harassment of Animals.

Except as otherwise authorized in these regulations or in the Fish and Game Code, no person shall harass, herd or drive any game or nongame bird or mammal or furbearing mammal. For the purposes of this section, **harass is defined as an intentional act which disrupts an animal's normal behavior patterns, which includes, but is not limited to, breeding, feeding or sheltering.** This section does not apply to a landowner or tenant who drives or herds birds or mammals for the purpose of preventing damage to private or public property, including aquaculture and agriculture crops.

Change without regulatory effect 8/9/2019.

§251.3. Prohibition Against Feeding Big Game Mammals.

No person shall knowingly feed big game mammals, as defined in Section 350 of these regulations.

Change without regulatory effect 8/9/2019.

Consequences of Feeding Wildlife

- **Food-conditioned:** Animal has learned to associate people, human activities, human-use areas, and/or storage receptacles with food rewards.



Consequence of Feeding Wildlife


(continued)



Food-conditioning leads to:

- Proximity tolerance
- Risky behavior
- Potential for conflict
- Bites or scratches on humans most commonly occurred where bears were being fed by humans



A young brown bear cub is walking across a paved asphalt path. The cub is facing left and has thick, dark brown fur. The path is bordered by green grass and some fallen leaves on the left side. The background shows a continuation of the path and some foliage.

Won't Feeding or
Giving Water to
Wildlife Help?

The Problem(s) With Supplemental Resources...

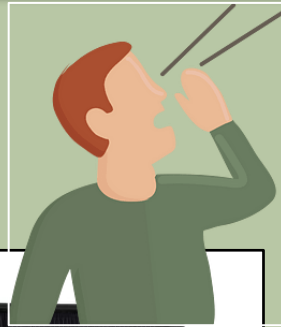
- Causes animals to congregate in one area – wildlife may fight or spread disease
- Likely to attract more wildlife to urban/suburban areas
- Food stations can make wildlife dependent on human-provided sources
- Water stations can trap/drown smaller animals
- Even during drought conditions, **there are still "natural" food & water sources in southern CA**

Wildlife need respect, not handouts



“Scaring is Caring” - Deterrents

- **Deterrents:** objects, devices, or methods that dissuade wildlife from interacting with areas, people, plants, or other animals.
- Sensory items that discourage wildlife behavior or activity through sight, sound, smell, touch, or a combination of these things.



A Note About Deterrents

- **No deterrent** is 100% effective 100% of the time
- Use **several methods together** consistently and over time
- **Every animal is an individual** and will show varying levels of comfort to deterrents – takes times to learn!
- Local city and county **ordinances should be considered** prior to utilizing some deterrents



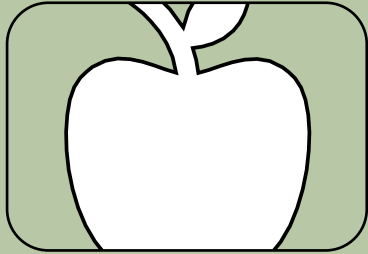
Ex - bear bells have been shown to be ineffective in preventing bear interactions!

“Scaring is Caring” - Hazing

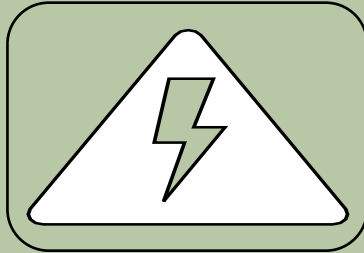
- **Hazing:** technique where deterrents are used to modify or halt an undesirable behavior.
- Idea is to “teach” wildlife that what it is doing will not be tolerated around humans or human-use areas.
- **NOTE:** not always appropriate to haze (ex - injured/sick animals or adults with young/near den)



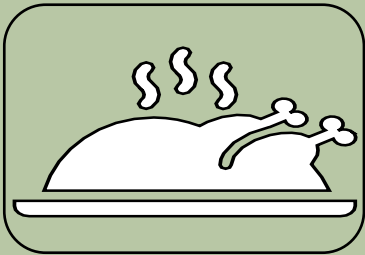
Backyard and Garden



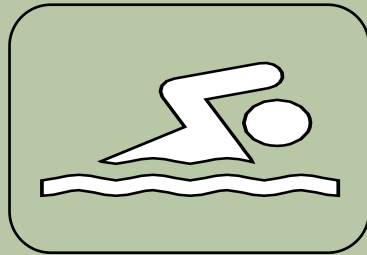
Harvest ripe fruit or vegetables, pick up rotting fruit off the ground



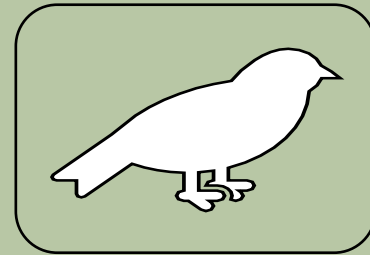
Secure trees and gardens with electric fencing



Sanitize and clean BBQs regularly



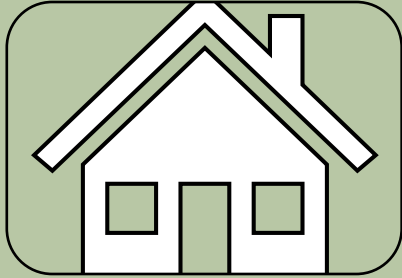
Place sturdy covers over pools and hot tubs when not in use



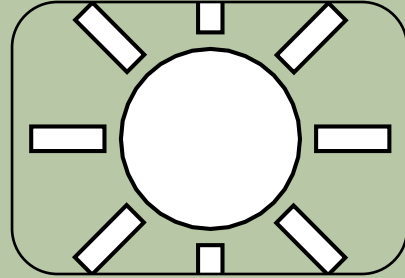
Avoid using bird feeders - plant native plants to attract birds and pollinators



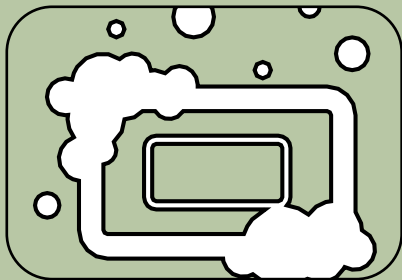
Trash Receptacles



Store cans inside garage or fully-enclosed metal structure



Place cans on street the morning of pick-up only



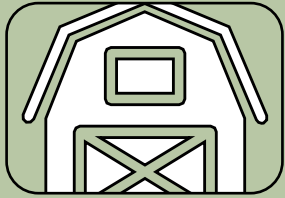
Clean cans frequently with ammonia or bleach



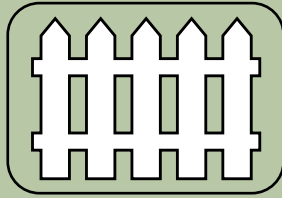
Purchase, rent, or advocate for bear-resistant cans



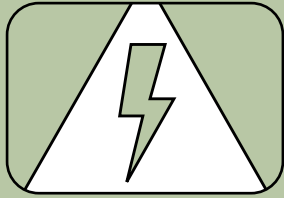
“Barnyard” Animals



Night-pen in completely enclosed shelter structures



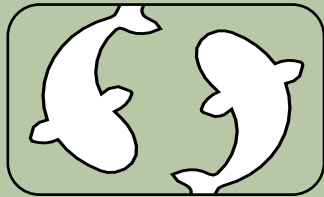
Structures should have roof + walls + buried wire or concrete floor



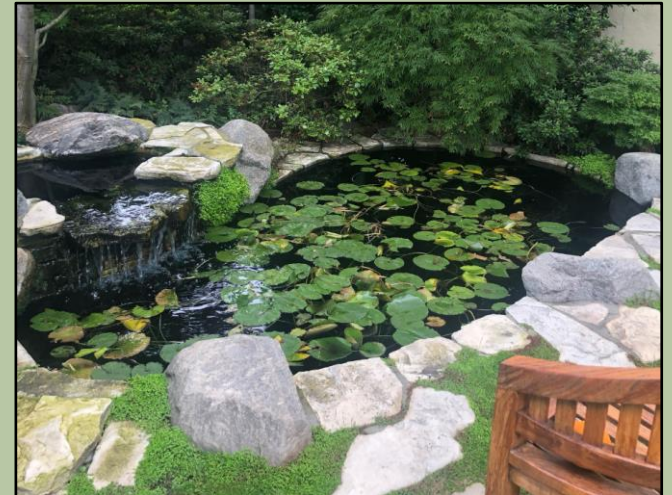
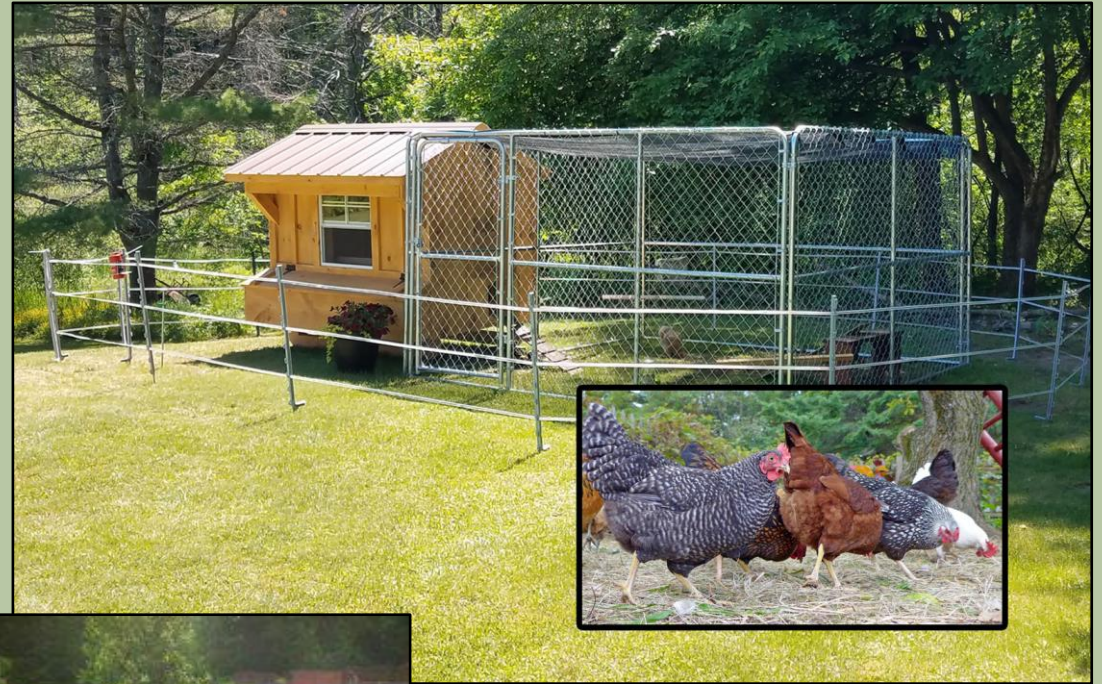
Use electric fencing for chicken coops and beehives (or tie-downs)



Store feed in fully enclosed, secured structures



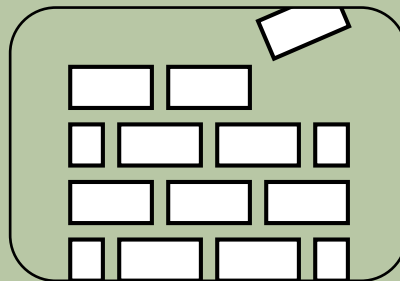
Create deep fish ponds with hiding structures



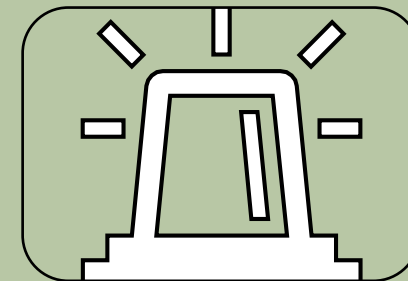


© blowtorch101

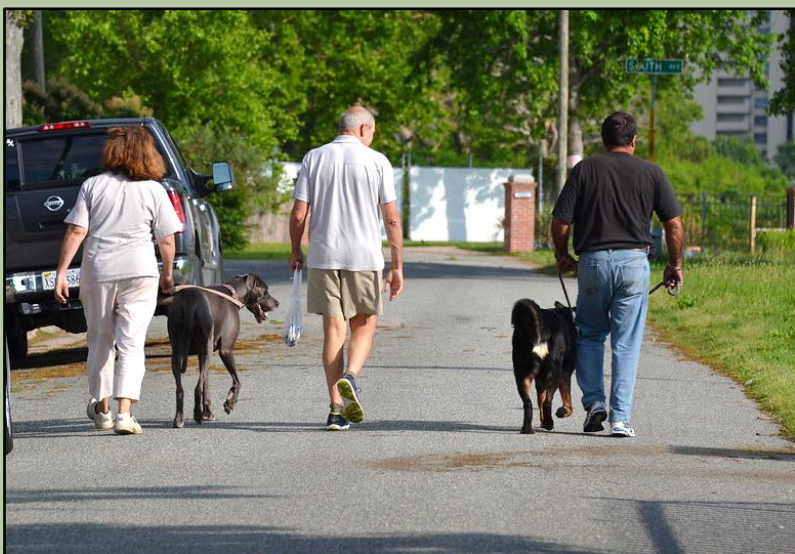
Around the Home



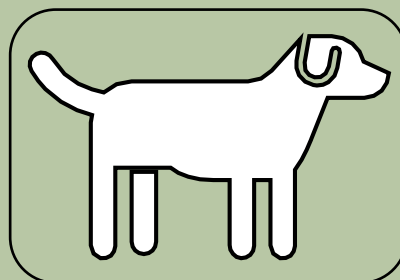
Securely close off crawl spaces under homes, porches, and decks



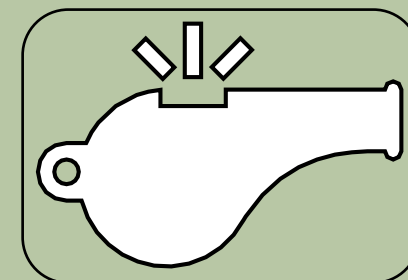
Install motion-detecting strobe lights, alarms, or physical deterrents



© Tony Alter



Keep dogs on-leash, and inside when unable to be monitored outside



Carry a walking stick, whistle, air horn, or noise maker

Human-Bear Encounters

- Stop - DO NOT RUN
- Avoid cornering the animal, allow them room to escape
- Back away slowly - face animal and maintain eye contact
- If animal approaches you: stand your ground, make yourself look larger, yell, clap, throw small objects towards the animal
- Fight back if attacked (don't play dead)
- Remember: give them respect, don't approach



A black bear cub is shown in a natural, forest-like environment. The cub is looking towards the camera with a calm expression. The background is filled with green foliage and tree branches, creating a sense of being in a wild, natural habitat. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day.

Living with Black Bears Takeaways

- **Give respect** – bears are an intelligent and adaptable species that will continue to share the landscape with humans
- **Take action** – make changes to protect people and property (do not provide food/water)
- **Stay safe** – awareness is the best prevention for human-wildlife conflict!



Thank You For Keeping Wildlife Wild!

© Maximilian Maurer

Human-Wildlife Conflicts Program
wildlife.ca.gov/HWC




Wildlife Incident Reporting (WIR) System
wildlife.ca.gov/WIR




CDFW Hotline – Volunteer Staffed: (562) 596-3885

CDFW South Coast Region Headquarters: (858) 467-4201

Wildlife Emergency: 911

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