

Reading Passage (276 words): Bears

Bears are mammals of the family Ursidae. Bears are classified as caniforms, or doglike carnivorans, with the pinnipeds being their closest living relatives. Although there are only eight living species of bear, they are widespread, appearing in a wide variety of habitats throughout the Northern Hemisphere and partially in the Southern Hemisphere. Bears are found on the continents of North America, South America, Europe, and Asia. There are a few things to keep in mind about bears.

When bears lose their fear of people, they become more likely to attack. Therefore, in communities where bears and humans live in close proximity to each other, and, if the people in those communities feed the bears, the bears will recognize humans as a food source, hence making them more likely to attack humans in the future.

Bears are naturally aggressive toward humans. This aggression may be displayed by the bear standing on its hind legs, a sure signal that it is preparing to charge its victim. In addition, before attacking humans, bears are known to huff and growl or even slap the ground, again indicating that they are about to attack.

If you are confronted with an attacking bear, there are three things that you can do which may protect you from these predators. First, if the bear charges, run away as fast as you can. Second, if there is a tree nearby, climb it quickly, for most bears are unable to follow you up the tree. Third, as a last resort, the best defense against a bear is a gun. Shoot it as many times as you can, which will make it less likely to attack you.

Lecture (591 words): Misconceptions about Bears

Bear researchers across America have found that bears which are fed by people and those which are not afraid of people are no more likely to attack and may be less likely to attack than other bears. Consider two examples to support my claim. In Eagles Nest Township, MN, residents have fed wild black bears for over 40 years. Dozens of bears have lost their fear of people over the years. No one was attacked. Furthermore, In Pennsylvania, Dr. Gary Alt spent over a decade studying a 7-square-mile community called Hemlock Farms where 7,000 people coexisted with 21 bears. That many bears in 7 square miles is a higher bear density than exists in any national park or national forest. People regularly hand-fed the bears. No one was attacked.

People often confuse certain behaviors that bears exhibit, which in fact may not be aggressive at all, or at the very least not as aggressive as some would believe. For example, if a bear stands on its hind legs, it does not mean that the bear is aggressive. In fact, bears which stand on their hind legs means that they are trying to get a better view. This is not a threat or a signal that the bear is about to charge. Bears rarely attack, but, when they do, it is on all fours, with their heads down. In addition, huffs or growls or other displays such as snorting, salivating, snapping jaws, body posturing, etc. are meant to communicate dominance and scare you away. The bear is trying to avoid a fight. These examples show that the bears are not naturally aggressive toward humans.

Let's address a misconception about what to do if a bear attacks you. First of all, if you believe a bear is charging you in an attack, do not run. Running away from a bear triggers a chase response in the bear, and, since bears can run as fast as a racehorse for short distances, they can certainly outrun even the faster humans in any direction, including uphill. If you see a bear, talk to the bear. Make sure he sees you. Hold your arms high above your head. This will make you look like a much bigger animal to him. Continue to talk and slowly back away. If that does not work and if the bear chases you, drop to a fetal position. Cover your head and neck with your hands. Keep on your pack to protect your back. Even if the bear bites you, continue to play dead. Once he realizes that you are not a threat, he may leave. If he does not stop, fight back and make as much noise as possible. In addition, climbing a tree may not be the best method of escape against a charging bear. Most bears, even large bears like the grizzly bear, are able to climb trees to get to you because they have large claws designed for gripping and climbing trees. Finally, the best defense against a charging bear is non-lethal pepper spray, not a gun. People using guns against bears are more often attacked and more severely injured than those using pepper spray to defend themselves and deter the bear. While so-called "bear spray" cannot prevent an encounter with a bear, it is by far the best known method of preventing attack and injury, if an encounter occurs. Pepper spray is also nontoxic and will not permanently harm either the bear or the person exposed to it.

Writing Prompt: Summarize the main points in the lecture explaining how they oppose the main points in the reading passage.