

SWAN VALLEY BEAR NEWS

FALL 2009



Roaring grizzlies viewed from tree stand; were they mating?

By Sally Thomason

Sally is a longtime, part-time resident of the Cooney Creek area. She is a linguist and Salish language expert.

I spend most summer evenings in the Swan Valley sitting in a tree stand reading, swatting mosquitos and hoping to see bears. On July 5, 2009, I was on my rickety platform attached to some spindly lodgepoles 20 feet above a meadow. I saw three of them.

First a small black bear came out of the brush and trotted past my ladder and on up the hill and beyond. About an hour later, two does who were casually strolling across the meadow suddenly looked around and bolted up into the woods and away. A smallish grizzly bear came out of the trees to my right, near the far end of the meadow, and started across. When she (I'm guessing she) was half-way across, she suddenly whirled around and raced back the way she'd come and up into the woods and out of sight.

A third bear, a slightly larger grizzly, erupted out of the woods to my left, tearing after the smaller grizzly. He (I'm guessing he) was clearly chasing the smaller bear. He gave a cry, which sounded like a human cry, quite loud, just once.

Both bears disappeared into the woods up the hill to my right. But they sounded close: they started roaring, or at least one of them did. The roaring went on for at least ten minutes, softer and then louder, as if they were circling something—a deer carcass, maybe? (A raven flew in and was hanging around over there too.)

Or was one bear up a tree and roaring in distress? Or was one bear up a tree and the other bear circling the tree and roaring in irritation? I had (and have) no idea why the volume of the roaring kept rising and falling; I wasn't about to climb down the ladder and wander over toward them to try to find out.

Eventually the roaring stopped. A little later, the two grizzlies reemerged from the woods. One of them crossed the meadow and vanished into the trees on the

Cool Head Luke deters bluff-charging grizzly bear

By Luke Lamar

Luke is backcountry ranger in the Mission Mountains Wilderness, and he is working on the U.S. Geological Survey DNA project to assess the grizzly bear population and trends in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem.

I had just finished burning the barbwire on a bear rub tree at the junction of the North Hemlock trail and the 617 cut-across trail. (*Barbwire is used to snag bear hair for the DNA project. The wire is burned to clean it.*) I use a torch-type lighter that emits a sound that according to Tom Parker (who also had a close griz encounter after using the torch earlier this summer) kind of imitates a rarely heard sound that an aggressive bear uses.

I walked about 30 yards up the North Hemlock trail and heard what at first sounded like the distress call of a whitetail deer. Thinking nothing of it, I kept walking until something clicked in my head that the noise was continuing in a much-too-rapid sequence to be a deer, and was not as loud as the snort of a

deer.

I stopped and listened to the noise, hoof!, hoof!, hoof! sounding with crashing just over the ridge in the brush. It suddenly hit me that I was listening to the huffing and puffing of a bear. At first I thought the crashing in the brush was going down away from me, but I quickly realized the noise of huffing and crackling brush was coming directly towards me. When I first heard the noise, the bear was down over the ridge from me, out of sight.

When I realized the bear was coming up over the ridge towards me, I unholstered my bear spray and took the safety off. A beautiful blonde grizzly with dark eye rings (looked liked it had 2 black eyes), probably 450 lbs., appeared from out of sight at first around 75 yards away. It ran straight for me, not sprinting, but not jogging either.

As it was coming towards me, I yelled, "Hey bear,"

Food Conditioned Bears



Trapping and relocating was the highest cause of grizzly bear mortality in 2008 (see "We've Never had a Problem," page 3).

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Cool Head Luke, continued

a couple of times, not in an aggressive, loud tone, but loud enough for the bear to hear. The bear did not break its stride and kept coming. When it reached about 15-20 yards from me and I was convinced it wasn't going to stop and that I was surely going to use my bear spray, I yelled, "Hey bear," as loud as I could.

This worked and the bear stopped finally and stood facing me. I kept talking to the bear in a loud voice once it stopped, but it did not turn and take off. I realized that there were a couple of small diameter trees between me and the bear, so I stepped to the side of them so that the bear could get a good look at me. (The wind was blowing from the bear to me, so it couldn't smell me.) I did this and the bear still stood its ground, so I decided that if the bear wasn't going to back away, it was probably a good idea for me to slowly back away.

I started to do so, backing away diagonally, which I think helps aid bears in depth perception, while talking calmly to the bear. While doing so, the bear finally turned and took off down the ridge, huffing and puffing the whole time.

During the whole ordeal, I thought I could hear brush moving down below the charging bear, so I suspect there could have cubs around. The bear came out of a

great huckleberry patch, the berries the size of dimes.

The fact that the bear couldn't smell me makes me wonder how it knew I was there, and what provoked it to charge. My best bet is the blow-torch lighter that I had just used on the barbwire. It could have been a response to the sound from the torch, it could have been protecting its cubs, or it could have been claiming its huckleberry patch, or a combination of all three.

I'm just glad it was a bluff-charge and the bear didn't come all the way. Like I said, the wind was blowing pretty hard from the bear to me, so there's no telling how effective the bear spray would have been.

In other past bear encounters, usually I just talk to them in a non-aggressive, not-too-loud tone, which has usually worked well for me. In this case, that wasn't working, so I talked louder and more aggressively than I usually do when the bear approached within a less-than-comfortable distance.

I'm by no means saying that acting more bold and aggressive around an aggressive bear is the way to avoid getting mauled. I think every bear encounter requires a person to size up the situation and react differently in each situation depending on the bear, and variables like wind, food, cubs, etc.

Roaring grizzlies, continued

far side. The other one turned toward me and started up the meadow. I thought, oh boy, I'll get a good look and maybe even a photograph or two. But no: she, or he, soon stopped and settled down in the tall grass for a nap, disappearing entirely. This was a bit awkward, because by this time (it was now 8:30, half an hour or so since I'd first seen them), I was ready to go home, but I wasn't eager to climb down the ladder with my back to an invisible grizzly bear. I called home and requested an escort.

When husband Rich arrived I climbed down. Just after I got both feet on the ground, a ruffed grouse exploded out of a nearby bush, and the grizzly in the grass sat up and looked around myopically. He (or she) didn't see us, and settled down into invisibility again.

A few days later we asked local expert Tom Parker what those two bears were likely doing. He said they were probably mating (early July is within the normal mating period). If so, the female (surely not the male?) looked distinctly unenthusiastic at the sight of her suitor.

Postscript: I believe bears have super-acute senses of smell and hearing, but I'm not convinced that they pay constant attention to what their noses and ears are telling them. No bear has ever spotted me sitting on that platform. Nearly every deer that goes by stares at me with surprise and dismay, and the two mountain lions I've seen from the platform stared at me assessingly. Bears also tend not to notice me if I see them first when I'm walking in the woods. It's as if their attitude is, What, me worry?

Bear Fair dispels myths

By Ali Vissichelli, VISTA volunteer at Swan Ecosystem Center

"Remain perfectly still. Bears can hardly see; if you don't move, they won't see you. Or, you could just shoot it." Overheard at a restaurant, this approach served as an introduction to the many varied and often misinformed theories I have come across regarding cohabitation with bears, since moving to the Swan Valley two months ago.

On August 1 at the Hungry Bear Steakhouse, along with about 250 residents and visitors, I met with bear management biologists and a myriad of other experts to hear about current bear research and management, ask questions and distinguish fact from fiction at the Seeley-Swan Bear Fair. The restaurant's spacious back lawn served as the site for the semi-circle of canopies that shaded the fair's participants and guests.

Swan Valley Bear Resources organized this second annual event to promote peaceful coexistence between people and bears. Bear Resources is a Swan Valley organization of Northwest Connections, Swan Ecosystem Center and citizen volunteers.

The Karelian bear dogs of Wind River Bear Institute, with handler Renee VanCamp, demonstrated their approach to teaching bears to avoid places of human habitation. Scott Mackay of Gallagher Electric Fencing provided information and an example of the use of electric fencing to prevent bear problems. Chuck Jonkel, Great Bear Foundation, offered a career's worth of bear conservation and management experience.

We've Never had a Problem

By Mark Ruby, Swan Valley Bear Ranger

"We've never had a bear problem," are words bear conflict specialists like to hear. Yet often this comment comes after the fact: "We've never had a problem before."

Problems with bears raiding garbage, eating livestock, pet, or bird feed, or breaking into garages or homes can be addressed by catching and translocating the bears and then working with the landowners to remove or secure the attractants that drew the bear to human property. Reactive management is useful after a problem has developed. But preventing conflicts on private property is the long term solution.

When a bear rolls over the garbage can, you can clean up the mess and begin storing garbage in a closed garage. When bears thrash the birdfeeder, it can be brought in at night and when you are not at home. When a problem arises, find a solution. Useful as this ethic is, it is not enough.

Bears are strongly motivated by food. Each spring, summer and fall they are saddled with the challenge of creating enough fat reserves to survive through the denning season. Bears are driven to exploit a number of caloric resources, including those provided by humans, if available, which can lead to two undesirable qualities:

"habituation" and "food conditioning."

Habituation involves becoming accustomed to a recurring stimulus. Some deer in the Swan have become accustomed to highway traffic and have lost their fear of feeding alongside the road. For bears, habituation means the loss of fear of human properties, pets, and people. Food conditioning is a form of associative learning; bears that feed on human attractants recognize them as a consistent food source.

In an extreme example, black bears have been observed unscrewing garbage can lids in Yosemite National Park. According to Tim Manley, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks grizzly bear management specialist, the Albino Basin male (see Obituary, page 5) visited several homes in the Swan Valley, but commonly broke in where a white refrigerator could be seen from a window.

Habituated and food conditioned bears create a substantial challenge to bear conflict specialists, especially when other naturally occurring foods aren't plentiful. Bears that consistently cause problems are eventually killed by managers due to safety concerns for humans, which is summed up by the adage, "A fed bear is a dead

bear."

There is no magical solution to keeping every human attractant off limits to bears. People produce garbage and have pets, livestock, orchards and gardens. However, simply because someone has never had a bear problem is not justification for not taking necessary measures to prevent one. The challenge then becomes keeping human attractants largely unavailable to bears so they never become a learned food source and start a bear down the

slippery slope of food conditioning.

Why is the reduction of mortality so critical to the long term success of bear populations? Bears are the slowest reproducing mammals in North America. One diagnostic example provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service indicates it may take as long as 10 years for a female in this ecosystem to replace herself with an adult offspring. Faster breeding

mammals like hares may replace themselves several times within a single year. Slower reproducing populations are more vulnerable to incurring mortality. With grizzly bears, causes of mortality must be carefully examined.

Within the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem, management removals of grizzly bears counted as the leading cause of bear mortality in 2008.

Prevention of bear-human conflict is the key to the sustained long-term ability to preserve bear populations and diminish bear problems around human centers.



"Food conditioned" bears put people at risk. Condon resident Gary Freyholtz examines a broken window after the Albino grizzly entered a cabin to find food in a white refrigerator (see Obituary, page 5).



Grizzly bear on Highway 83. Photo by Adam Lieberg

Hunting in Bear and Lion Country

By Patti Sowka, Living With Wildlife Foundation

Shorter days and cooler nights hint that hunting season is here. Before heading out into the woods, it's good to think about how we can stay safe as we move quietly through the woods in search of our quarry.

Montana is home to grizzly bears, American black bears and mountain lions. While these predators generally don't include humans on their list of prey species, they can be dangerous while protecting a food source or when a mother bear is protecting her cubs.

We can take basic precautions to greatly lessen the possibility or severity of an attack by bears and mountain lions. First, have bear pepper spray along and to keep it easily accessible at all times during your hunt. Bear spray was originally developed for use in deterring bear attacks, but it has been used successfully to deter other species, including mountain lions in aggressive encounters.

Many brands of spray are available. It is very important that the brand you purchase is registered as "bear spray" by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). DO NOT USE MACE or personal defense spray as a substitute for bear spray! A can of EPA-registered bear pepper spray costs approximately \$50 (\$40 at Swan Ecosystem Center with a holster).

You might consider including bear-resistant food storage containers in your hunting gear. Several types that have been tested and shown to be bear-resistant and are listed in the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee web site at www.igbconline.org.

In grizzly bear occupied areas in Montana, public land management agencies require that you use "approved" containers for food and garbage storage while recreating in those areas. So it is a good idea to check with the Forest Service authority for that area to find out what specific food storage requirements may apply.

Safety Measures:

- Hunt with a partner. Predators are less likely to approach when there are at least two people.
- DO NOT leave game carcasses or gut piles near trails used by people who are hiking, hunting or riding.
- Field dress game animals immediately when possible and remove meat from the field as soon as possible.
- If you must leave your game in the field overnight, use caution and make noise when retrieving the car-

cass as you approach it. DO leave game carcasses where you can see them from a distance in case a bear or other wild animal has "claimed" it.

- DO leave game meat at least 200 yards from gut piles. This will make it safer to retrieve your game meat.
- DO NOT camp near game meat – sleeping tents should be located at least 200 yards from game carcasses.
- Hang game carcasses 10 feet above the ground and at least 4 feet from any support that a bear can climb (example: tree or wooden post).
- Be alert for recent bear or lion activity in the area – take note of scats, kills and lion scrapes as these signs can suggest recent predator activity in the area.
- If you happen to encounter a bear or mountain lion, DO NOT RUN. Running may trigger the predator-prey response and could result in the animal pursuing you.
- If you are attacked by a black bear or a mountain lion, fight back and use that bear pepper spray you're carrying!
- Remember that many grizzly bears can climb trees, so this isn't usually an effective way to divert an aggressive attack by either species.
- Use sticks, rocks or other hard objects and other aggressive behavior to show black bears and mountain lions you're not an easy prey item.
- Keep a clean camp and store all food and garbage in a bear-resistant manner.

For more information on avoiding conflicts with wildlife, please visit the Living with Wildlife Foundation (LWWF) at www.lwwf.org. LWWF is a nonprofit foundation that works to help people and wildlife coexist.

The LWWF has compiled a series called the *Living with Predators (LWP) Resource Guides* that contain detailed information about how to live and recreate safely in wild places. The guides contain a list of excellent books and videos that offer specific recommendations on what to do if attacked by bears or lions. The LWP Resource guides can be viewed and downloaded from the LWWF web site at www.lwwf.org.

Bear Fair continued

The advantages and uses of bear pepper spray were explored with a demonstration from Dave Parker of Counter Assault. His lively presentation kept the audience jumping, literally, as periodic sprays from an inert can never failed to startle a spectator or two.

Tim Manley, Montana FWP Grizzly Bear Specialist, treated guests to never-before-seen footage from a project involving trapping and relocating problem bears. Second-

year participant, Paula Clarke, raved over the presentation, "It was spectacular. Tim Manley gives a double whammy of narration and visuals."

When attendees weren't busying themselves with presentations, they could be found making plaster molds of bear tracks, chatting about bears and consuming beer and bratwurst.

Obituary: Albino Basin Male euthanized

The bear known as the Albino Basin Male or Bear No. 191 was caught up Cold Creek August 31 and euthanized the next day by a state veterinarian. His estimated age was 20 years, quite old for a bear. His death marks an end to a string of cabin break-ins that earned the Albino male a reputation, albeit an infamous one. The bear's management history forced the need for euthanasia.

The Albino Male was caught for the first time in 2004 in Barber Creek, during a black bear research effort in the Swan Valley. He was radio collared, but only wore the device for a short time before shedding it within the valley bottom. With a hair sample collected and on record, the bear was connected to other DNA left high in a hair snare set by the U.S. Geological Survey bear DNA study in Albino Basin in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Thus, the male earned his popular moniker.

Leaving more bits of hair at the scene, the Albino Male was linked to several backcountry cabins in the Bob Marshall in Youngs Creek and Big Prairie in 2006.

The bear caused biologists to stand up and take note

as it broke into a documented 10 cabins in 2007, including Falls Creek Ranch and other nearby cabins. Displaying uncharacteristic bear behavior, the Albino Male did not return to the cabins he had forced entry upon, leaving him difficult to trap for reacting agency managers.

He continued ticking cabins off his list in 2008, when he raided the refrigerators of a trailer and two more cabins up Cold Creek. In 2009 the bear displayed unprecedented behavior when he returned to a cabin previously visited. This occasion landed him inside a culvert trap set by Grizzly Management Specialist Tim Manley and ended his four year spree.

It appeared the male had a pension for targeting places with white refrigerators visible from the window. Nearby cabins whose refrigerators could not be seen by the peeping bear remained unmolested, but were marked with a paw prints on the window.

The Albino Male will be mounted and placed at the MT Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Region 1 office.



Bear Troubles? Contact:

Tim Manley
 Grizzly Bear Management Specialist
 (Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks):
 Cell phone: (406) 250-1265
 Home phone: (406) 892-0802

Eric Wenum
 Black Bear and Mountain Lion Specialist
 (Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks)
 Office Phone: (406) 752-5501
 Cell Phone: (406) 250-0062
 Home Phone: (406) 756-1776

Emergencies
 Dial **911** if you live in Seeley Lake or Condon
 If you live in Swan Lake dial **886-2324**

Permission for Bear Managers to Enter My Property

Landowner's name(s) _____

Permanent address _____

Local address _____

Telephone number(s) _____ email _____

Swan Valley telephone number _____

Permission granted until revoked by landowner(s) (check here) _____

Or time period during which access is permitted (month/day/year through month/day/year) _____

Signature(s) _____

Return this form to: Tim Manley, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, 490 N. Meridian, Kalispell, MT 59901

How To Prevent Bear Problems

Each of us is responsible for keeping a clean camp and ensuring that we do not encourage problem behavior among bears. Here are some tips:

- Haul garbage to the dump as often as possible.
- Feed pets inside. If this is not feasible, do not leave uneaten pet food outside, especially overnight.
- Keep coolers, refrigerators, or freezers **inside**, even if empty!
- Clean and securely store barbecue grills.
- Keep pet food, garbage, human food, and all odorous food-like items secure in a sturdy building away from doors and windows, in a bear-proof container or elevated in an Alaska-style cache.
- Do not leave food or garbage in your vehicle.
- It is best not to feed birds in summer or fall. If you must, (bird species that live here do not require feeding) place only a small amount of seed into the feeder each day so that it will be completely consumed before dark.
- Bring hummingbird feeders in at night and while you're away. An alternative to hummingbird feeders is a bright basket of flowers such as fuchsias.
- Avoid planting clover. It is not native, and is becoming a favorite among bears.
- Grain attracts bears. Avoid feeding deer grain. Supplemental feeding interferes with a deer's ability to digest natural foods, and deer attract mountain lions, an additional threat.
- If you have a vegetable garden, especially carrots, consider placing an electric fence around the perimeter, or hang "critter-gitters." Pull carrots by September 15th, a magic carrot hour according to Tim Manley.
- Compost piles are not recommended.
- Avoid using bone meal on gardens.
- Do not leave fish entrails along streams or trails. Puncture the air bladder and sink the entrails in deep water, or pack them out.
- Hang game in a very secure building or Alaska-style cache.

Butcher meat as soon as possible. If you must hang meat outside, hang it at least 10 feet off the ground and 4 feet away from tree trunks.

- Pick fruit as it ripens.
- If there is a bear in your yard and it doesn't appear to be just passing through, make noise by banging pots and pans together and shouting to try to encourage the bear to leave. Do not approach the bear.
- A general rule of thumb: anything with an odor, even if it is not food-related can attract bears to your property. Keep anything with an odor in a secure place (bears have been known to get into motor oil, antifreeze, gasoline, paint, and cleaning agents).

The **SWAN VALLEY BEAR NEWS** is published as a cooperative effort of the Living With Wildlife Foundation; Northwest Connections; Swan Ecosystem Center; Swan Valley residents; Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Flathead National Forest.

THE BEARS NEED YOUR HELP

Swan Valley Bear News is funded in large part by private donations. To donate, please send a check earmarked "Bears" to Swan Ecosystem Center, 6887 Highway 83, Condon, MT 59826. To donate by credit card, contact us at 406/754-3137, 406/754-3138.



Visit our Bear Aware web page at SwanEcosystemCenter.org

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