

# SWAN VALLEY BEAR NEWS

FALL 2010



## People and Bears Prize Montana's Huckleberries

by Mark Ruby

**"How are the hucks this year?" is a common question asked around Montana each summer. The wild purple berry may be Montanan's favorite fruit for those who brave steep hillsides and vicious mosquitoes to gather quart after quart. Huckleberries are so prized that it is a misdemeanor in Montana to label a food product "huckleberry" if it contains another fruit. These berries are not only important to Montana's people, but also to Montana's bears.**

Montana has seven species of huckleberry that range from two inches tall with tiny berries to large shrubs with bean-sized berries. These native berries are typically found between 3,500 and 7,200 feet of elevation. Any good huckleberry picker knows to look in forests with 50% canopy cover or in post burned areas, old logging areas, avalanche slopes or in other areas where the shrub can soak up the necessary amount of sunlight.

For people, huckleberries can have healthy benefits. Huckleberries are a good source of B vitamins. These vitamins are purported to promote a healthy metabolism, help cell growth, maintain healthy skin and muscle tone, and even help prevent pancreatic cancer. Huckleberries are also a good source of Vitamin C or ascorbic acid that help immune function and can help prevent cardiovascular disease.

High in sugars and carbohydrates, huckleberries are also a major bear food and can be an essential dietary need for bears trying to fatten up for the winter. Bears exhibit opportunistic foraging behavior based on seasonally and locally available food sources. Bears have relatively simple digestive systems that do not process fiber from plant material efficiently, thus making it difficult to build up fat reserves on grasses and other fibrous plants. **Thus berries play an important role in building a bear's energy reserves.**

Dr. Richard Mace and Dr. Charles Jonkel conducted analyses of grizzly bear scat from the South Fork and North Fork of the Flathead River valleys. Results found

fruit from 11 different shrubs and identified globe huckleberry as the most important for both areas. In the Mission Mountains, grasses and sedges held the highest value of importance, yet serviceberry was found to be the dominant fruit in scats.

While bears can feed on a variety of plants, insects, and animals, poor crop years for fruit-bearing shrubs or other naturally occurring foods can lead to higher conflict rates between people and bears as bears become more

desperate to meet their caloric intake needs. In Yellowstone, researchers examined trends in human-bear conflict from 1992-2000 and **found that bears damaging people's property** and obtaining human foods was correlated to years with poor abundances of naturally occurring foods.

Foraging bears are not only limited by availability of berries, but of the efficiency of their digestive tract and physical ability to eat enough of the small berry. Research pertaining **to bears' berry intake indicated that bears**

ingested berries at a rate of 30 grams per minute to greater than 200 grams per minute in experimental trials. In terms of quantity, a captive grizzly consumed an estimated 184,000 berries in a day. Density of berries, energetic needs of the bear, and proximity of huckleberry patches all play a role in how Montana bears feed.

While huckleberries can comprise a major component **of a bear's diet, other seasonally or regionally available** foods can be equally important to bears. The complex ecology associated with seasonal availability of bear foods like huckleberries may hold great management potential for modeling species conflicts and population fluctuation of Montana bears. Being able to predict berry **production may also influence Montana's huckleberry economic market**, as more than 30 Montana businesses rely on huckleberries to produce their products. Simpler yet, knowing what kind of berry year is to come may determine how much of your stockpile to use up this winter.



# Swan Valley Bear-Resistant Garbage Containers

*Tips and Tricks by Mark Ruby*

Bear-resistant garbage containers perform their utility well. Thick-molded forest green polycarbonate plastic can fend off the prying teeth and claws of a grizzly bear. Even 800 pounds of hungry ursid force cannot break the zinc-coated steel collar holding the container lid securely in place. Bear-resistant containers go through a rigorous certification process and must meet standards set by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee. These containers also have to survive a couple hours of prying and prodding by the bears at the Wolf and Grizzly Discovery Center in West Yellowstone to **earn the distinction "bear-resistant."**

However, these containers come with several tips and tricks that make the containers more effective at dissuading bears from trying to snack on your garbage.

Bears have an excellent sense of smell. In fact, grizzly bear brains have an area the size of a golf ball dedicated to their olfactory sense. Keeping your garbage container clean may seem like an ironic endeavor, but cleaning the container with a very dilute bleach/water solution can remove smells that wastes can leave over time. To avoid the potentially nasty job of scrubbing the containers, some have taken them through the car wash. Smelly garbage containers can become attractants to bears and entice curious bruins close to homes.

Securing a plastic bag liner within your garbage container can help eliminate wastes and odors left behind by your garbage. Most bear-resistant garbage cans are larger than many conventional garbage bags. In some cases, large industrial plastic garbage bags can be purchased and stretched around the rim of the garbage container. As an alternative, a modular system may be an easier strategy. Placing a smaller garbage can within the larger bear-resistant container can allow a person to use smaller garbage bags on the inner can.

In some cases, folks haul their own bagged garbage to the Seeley transfer site or up to the Porcupine Creek refuse site in Lake County. Fishing bagged garbage out of the bottom of the larger garbage container can be an annoying practice. Smaller cans or buckets can be inverted and set in the bottom of your bear-resistant container making your bagged garbage easier to reach.

Transporting bear-resistant containers long distances, without a good lifting ability and a truck bed, can be difficult due to the size and durable build of bear-resistant containers. Swan Ecosystem Center has information about carriers that attach to your trailer hitch for larger garbage containers. These carriers may ease the transportation logistics to get

your container from your house to the end of the road or to a refuse site.

As Fall progresses and the temperature gets cooler, built up moisture under the container lid has been known to freeze the latches. This can be prevented by spraying WD-40 on the latch mechanism to keep it from freezing. This will **also prevent you from using a "blow torch" on your container lid to open it in late November.**



*The green dots represent GPS points which show the locations of bear-resistant garbage containers.*

Swan Valley Bear Resources operates a loaner program where residents of the Swan Valley can pick up a bear-resistant garbage container for personal use free of charge. The program has presently provided over 100 containers for members of the community to use and there are a few more available for loan. To check out a container only requires name, address, and phone number. We GPS the location.

If you have developed your own tricks for storing garbage please pass the word along. The best ideas come from inventive community members. Similarly, questions, concerns or comments are also welcome concerning attractants, containers, or bears.

Garbage management is a major component of reducing human-bear conflicts. Bears are largely driven by their stomachs

and can learn to seek out human foods if they receive a food reward from available garbage, pet or livestock foods, bird seed, or other human attractants. Fall can be an especially difficult time for bears due to diminishing availability of natural foods and increasing metabolic needs for bears trying to put on the last needed pounds before denning up for winter. For a more complete list of bear attractants, see page 3. Please contact Swan Valley Bear Resources for more information at 406-754-3137.

## **Bear Troubles, Who to Call**

### **Tim Manley**

Grizzly Bear Management Specialist  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP)  
Cell Phone: (406) 250-1265  
Home Phone: (406) 892-0802

### **Eric Wenum**

Black Bear and Mountain Lion Specialist  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP)  
Cell Phone: (406) 250-0062  
Home Phone: (406) 756-1776  
Office Phone: (406) 752-5501 Kalispell R-1

### **Emergencies**

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

# Funds Needed for More Bear-Resistant Garbage Containers

One of the most dangerous temptations for bears in the Swan Valley is unsecured garbage. Once a wild bear learns to find food in garbage, his or her chances for survival are drastically reduced. Swan Valley Bear Resources operates a loaner program of bear-resistant garbage containers for personal use free of charge to anyone in the community. These 64-gallon, wheeled containers have a self-latching lid that prevents bears and other critters from accessing the garbage inside. When used properly, bear-resistant garbage containers are an important tool for teaching bears to stay away from garbage by denying them a food reward.

This loaner program has been so successful that over 100 containers have gone to community members and less than a dozen containers are now available for

loan. Many landowners and residents are yet to be served so your contribution will help purchase more. The mission of Swan Valley Bear Resources is to offer community resources to promote coexistence between people and bears. Swan Valley Bear Resources is a collaborative effort between local non-profit conservation organizations and community members to pool resources, experience and expertise in addressing bear conflicts on private property in the Swan Valley.

Initial funding came from the following: American Wildlands, Defenders of Wildlife, Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee, Montana Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Plum Creek Timber Co., private donations, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service and Wildlife Land Trust.

## Help Us Buy More Bear-Resistant Garbage Containers

Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have a bear-resistant garbage container on loan or do you own one? Loan \_\_\_\_\_ Own \_\_\_\_\_

**I want to contribute to the "Bear-Resistant Garbage Container Fund" to help purchase more containers for use in the Swan Valley Bear Resources Loaner Program. I've enclosed my check for \$ \_\_\_\_\_. Any amount will help!**

Please send your check to Swan Ecosystem Center, 6887 MT Highway 83, Condon, MT 59826.

Would you like to check-out a bear resistant garbage container? NO \_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_

## Permission for Bear Managers to Enter My Property

Landowner's name(s) : \_\_\_\_\_

Permanent address: \_\_\_\_\_

Local physical 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): \_\_\_\_\_

# Know Your Bear Attractants

## Food and Garbage

Soda, sweetened beverages  
 Beer, wine, cider, grain-based beverages  
 Food preparation odors  
 Unsecured garbage  
 Garbage with an odor  
 Empty recycling cans  
 Cans or jars of food  
 Freezer with or without food  
 Cooler—with or without food  
 BBQ grills and food smokers  
 Burn barrels with unburned materials  
 Harvested game meat

## Garden

Compost  
 Nuts or ripe fruit on trees or ground  
 Other fruits or vegetables outside  
 All fertilizers—organic, fish, etc.

## Pet and Livestock Feed

Dog, cat or other pet food  
 Bird seed/feeders and hummingbird feeders  
 Grain, stock feed, molasses  
 Mineral or salt blocks  
 Manure/animal waste  
 Blood, raw meat or guts  
 Animal hides  
 Livestock carcasses and bone yards

## Auto and Shop

Motor oil, antifreeze, gasoline  
 Windshield wiper fluid  
 Armor-All, car cleaning products  
 Paint, varnish, paint thinner, lacquers  
 Cleaning agents  
 Be a good neighbor and minimize bear attractants on your property ... **thanks!**

Place first  
 class stamp  
 here

SWAN VALLEY BEAR RESOURCES  
 6887 MT Highway 83  
 Condon, MT 59826

# Montana Highway 83 Claims Two Black Bears, One Grizzly <sup>5</sup>

by Adam Lieberg

This summer two black bears were hit and killed by vehicles along MT Highway 83. The first black bear was killed in early June about a quarter mile south of Holland Lake Road. This bear turned out to be a 3-year-old male who had been frequenting homes in the nearby Lindbergh Lake neighborhood. The second bear, a cub of the year, was hit later in August only a few miles south of the previous highway mortality. Motorists that strike a bear or observe a bear dead along the highway should report this to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. If the bear is a grizzly, please inform the game warden, grizzly bear management specialist, or Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks regional office.

We did not witness any grizzly mortality or hear of any reports of grizzlies getting hit on the highway this summer. However a grizzly was killed at mile-marker 21 in early September.

According to Tim Manley, grizzly bear management specialist with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, there was a small pulse of black bear mortalities along highways around the

Flathead Valley, concentrated early in the summer. This may be related to the fact that higher elevations experienced a very late green-up, which had all wildlife, black bears in particular, concentrated in the lower elevations for more of the summer.

Interesting data is available by digging through statistics for animal-vehicle collisions on roads. Collision data is not standardized between states and information is typically collected by dead animal pick-up, insurance claims or ad hoc reports from motorists that either observed or struck wildlife themselves. National-level data indicates one million animals are killed by vehicles each year. In the Swan, wildlife vehicle collisions are typically those of vehicles colliding with deer. In the U.S. each year, 200 people are killed and 29,000 are injured in deer vehicle collisions alone. In some states, an estimated 6 to 8 cents of every insurance dollar goes to paying wildlife

vehicle collision-related claims.

Separating out road mortalities of specific species is more difficult. In some states, such as Florida, vehicle collisions are the largest source for black bear mortalities. Very little information exists for road mortalities for black bears in Montana. Road crossing behavior for black bears can be complex. Research has indicated road crossing behavior can depend on habitat, road design, traffic volume, season and time of day.

A 2006 examination of black bears in relation to roads

in the Swan Valley by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks biologist Tonya Chilton indicated black bears spent more time near roads during the daytime and moved away from roads in twilight and night time periods. Seasonal changes in food availability and land use may also affect black bear proximity to roads.

Crossing structures for wildlife such as overpasses and underpasses have had some success for facilitating collision-free crossing for many species of wildlife. Structures un-

der US Highway 93 on the Flathead Indian Reservation have been used by a variety of wildlife. Along the southern border of Glacier National Park, an overpass constructed for vehicles allows mountain goats to cross under US Highway 2 to reach the Goat Lick. Understanding wildlife and road crossing behavior is a relatively new field in wildlife management. Success in reducing collisions between animals and vehicles on the road can have many social and biological benefits.



*Collisions with vehicles is a sad fact for many wildlife species when crossing the Swan Valley's Montana Highway 83.*

## Please Take a Closer Look!

Seasonal wildlife migrations across the Swan Valley will begin soon. Try to avoid a possible wildlife collision by taking some extra driving time ... slow down and enjoy the beautiful scenery.

# Be A Good Neighbor and Help Prevent Bear Problems

Each of us is responsible for ensuring that we do not encourage problem behaviors among bears. Here are some tips:

- Feed pets inside. If this is not feasible, do not leave uneaten pet food outside, especially overnight.
- 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-resistant garbage container or elevated in an Alaska-style cache.
- Keep coolers, refrigerators, or freezers inside, even if empty!
- Store BBQ grills securely.
- Haul garbage to the dump as often as possible.
- Do not leave food or garbage in your vehicle.
- It is best not to feed birds in summer or fall. Bird species that live here do not require feeding. If you must feed birds, 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, even for the day.** An alternative to hummingbird feeders is a garden or a planter of bright-colored native plants .
- Clover attracts bears. Avoid planting clover. It is not native to the Swan Valley, and is becoming a favorite food of 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, 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. Pick-up fruit off the ground.
- **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 any bear.**
- A general guideline: 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 can get into motor oil, antifreeze, gasoline, paint, and cleaning agents). Check outdoor saunas for shampoo, soap and toothpaste.

Thanks for all your efforts being a good neighbor!

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 & Parks; U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and the 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 MT Highway 83, Condon, MT 59826.** To donate by credit card, contact us at (406) 754-3137. Visit our Swan Valley Bear Resources link at [SwanEcosystemCenter.org](http://SwanEcosystemCenter.org).



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