

Wildlife Viewing on Vancouver Island BC (Including Black Bears)

Stats on B.C. Wildlife:

- Three-quarters of Canada's mammal species are found in British Columbia, and 24 of those species are exclusive to our province.
- Over 250 bird species breed in the province, 162 of those (55%) breed nowhere else in Canada.

General Wildlife Viewing Tips:

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- Use responsible viewing practices. Avoid harassing wildlife, causing disturbances at feeding areas, damaging critical habitats or causing disturbances at breeding sites, which can leave eggs and young animals vulnerable to predation. Try not to do anything that changes an animal's behaviour.
- While viewing or photographing wildlife, use viewing blinds, bridges, natural features or your car to minimize wildlife disturbance. View from a distance and use telephoto lenses, binoculars or spotting scopes.
- Watch animal behaviour for signs of disturbance or alarm. If this occurs, alter your behaviour.
- Never feed wildlife. It is unsafe, illegal and often leads to disaster for animals if they continue to seek human food sources.
- Move slowly and quietly. Avoid wearing bright clothes.
- Use guides and local knowledge to enhance your viewing experience and safety.
- In our Northern climate, survival is usually a very delicate balance, and, for many species, even a few disturbances can cause death or failed reproduction.
- Watch for the following signs that animals may be experiencing stress as a result of your behaviour:
 - A raised head; the animal looks at observers. Mammals may point their ears in the direction of observers, or stand up to face them.
 - Any interruptions of feeding or migratory activities.
 - Displays of nervous behaviour: skittishness, the animal jumps at sounds or movements. Looking directly at an animal may trigger the fright/flight response it naturally has to predators.
 - Birds repeatedly move away, preen, wipe their bills or peck at dirt or feet.
 - Mammals might attempt to shield a calf or pup from a human intruder.
 - Animals make alarm calls; birds will repeatedly chirp and chip; mammals vocalize; marine mammals will fin, tail-lob, or breach.
 - Displays of aggressive behaviour: the animal moves away or lowers its head (mammals will bring ears back in preparation for a charge); erect hairs on neck and shoulder; charges directed at intruders.
- Always be patient and be ready to back off so that your disturbance is minimized.

(taken from Wildlife Viewing Guidelines, BC Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection)

Bear Specifics:

- Provincial Wildlife Branch Bear Viewing Guidelines require that viewers stay back from the bears **100 meters**.
- Bears are unpredictable and are sensitive to excessive disturbance

- Use a guide to improve your chances of seeing one, staying safe and not disturbing the bears
- Use established viewing areas where available
- Before 10 am and after 6 pm are often better times to see the bears
- Bear viewing in Oceanside begins in late April and May when bears emerge from the rainforest wilderness to feed in the hay fields around the edge of developed areas
- In June the bears begin to feast on salmon berries along island streams and black cap raspberries in burned over areas and logged clearings.
- The parade of berries continues through July and August with various black berries and huckleberries, then blueberries in the alpine in September. The black berries in late July and August are more abundant near the ocean.
- September also brings the pink salmon to local streams and the most reliable bear watching season begins. Various salmon species come and go through December when many of the bears go into shallow hibernation and these are not very active until March.
- On the Coast of Vancouver Island, the Black Bear makes its presence known when the tides are low. They roam the shores in search of their favourite delicacy, the Rock Crab and various shellfish.

Black Bear:

The American Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*), also known as simply the black bear or cinnamon bear, is the most common bear in North America.

The black bear occurs throughout much of North America from northern Canada and Alaska south into Mexico and from the Atlantic to the Pacific. While there were probably once as many as two million black bears in North America, the population declined to a low of 200,000 before rebounding in recent decades, partly due to conservation measures. By current estimates, more than 600,000 are living today.

The black bear is about 1.5 metres (5 feet) long. Females weigh between 40 and 180 kg (90 and 400 pounds), while males weigh between 50 and 400 kg (110 and 880 pounds). Cubs usually weigh between 200 and 450 g (between 7 oz and 1 pound) at birth.

Black Bears on Vancouver Island:

- Remain the only species of bear not officially considered threatened
- Of the 6 subspecies of Black Bears, only *Ursus americanus vancouveri* is found on Vancouver Island & nowhere else
- They are one of the world's most adaptable animals
- Will eat anything that is high in protein and energy
- Can run two times faster than humans
- Vastly prefer burned areas to mature forests or clear cuts
- Produce fewer offspring than any other mammal (1-4 cubs every few years)
- Adult males home range from 25 to 150 sq. km, that overlaps home ranges of a number of female bears
- Emerge from dens as early as late February or March in low elevation areas near the Pacific Coast (because of our mild climate, many do not hibernate at all!)
- Bears are naturally curious and love to explore
- See Wikipedia for bear encounters and more details
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Black_Bear

Grizzly Bears

There are grizzly bear tours that leave from northern Vancouver Island and visit mainland inlets by boat and plane. Campbell River, Telegraph Cove and Port McNeill are some of the popular launching locations.

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