



Living Smart With Wildlife



Bear spray truths revealed

As the mantra goes, don't bring a gun to a bear fight. Bring bear spray.

A study co-authored by University of Calgary professor Stephen Herrero found that those who use bear spray are much less likely to be injured during a bear attack than those who carry a gun.

The study, which examined bear encounters in Alaska and the Yukon, found that gun users were injured 50 per cent of the time during bear attacks; however those who used bear spray escaped injury 92 per cent of the time.

During a bear encounter, adrenaline can run high, which makes aiming a gun accurately extremely difficult. However spraying bear spray has a much higher likelihood of deterring the bear, as the precision required is much less.

Bear spray is potent enough to stop a bear, giving enough time to make an escape.

It affects the eyes, lungs, throat and nose of the animal, and its effects usually wear off in about an hour.

Bear spray is more powerful than regular pepper spray, and contains Capsaicin – the active ingredient in chili peppers.

"Bears rely on their senses. You want them to inhale it," said Conservation Officer Glenn Naylor.

"The bears inhale the vapor, and it gets into their eyes and they breathe it in."

Naylor recommends a spray and retreat method, getting as much distance as possible between you and the bear.

Just because a bear has been sprayed once, doesn't mean it won't be seen again, especially if you're in a remote area.

"You may have to use it again," Naylor said.

Bear spray is quite easy to use, as the mechanism functions much like any other aerosol can – only with greater range.

Depending on the wind, a good two to four second blast should be enough to stop a bear if it's within three to five meters of the user.

While the wind should be considered, research shows wind only affects bear spray in a limited manner, as it exits the can at an extremely high rate of speed.

Of the 71 instances studied by Herrero, only five were affected by the wind.

Bear spray is a must when traveling in bear country, and is quickly gaining in popularity.

It is available for sale at a number of outdoor equipment locations, and it is also available for rent at Tourism Canmore. While the spray is easy to use, caution is required when handling it.

Those accidentally hit with bear spray should flush their eyes with water.

Spraying actual bear spray for practice is not recommended, as once the seal is broken, small leaks can occur in the can, reducing the life of the bear spray.

If you are concerned about using bear spray, you can sign up for a bear safety course locally.

For those who are interested, there will be free bear spray training at the WildSmart Open House on May 24th, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Canmore Senior Centre. Come early to sign up, space is limited.

Bear spray could save your life. If you, friends or family are not carrying it now, make this your resolution for this year to purchase and carry it. For more information on bear safety go to www.wildsmart.ca



IN PHOTOS: Marie-Pierre Chappeland & Kananaskis Conservation Officer, Nick Dykshoorn



Report bear, cougar or aggressive elk to 403-591-7755
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