

# Wildlife in the Kananaskis Area

**Bears and Cougars inhabit the Kananaskis Park region and you may come into contact with either a bear or a cougar while participating in the Banded Peak Challenge.**

## **Bears:**

- All bears are dangerous and should be treated as such.
- Never approach or feed a bear.
- Avoid female bears with cubs; never go near a cub; a mother bear will aggressively protect her young.
- Remember to give bears a wide berth; they may look large and clumsy, but they can run as fast as 65kph both up and down hills for short distances.

## **While hiking and biking –**

- Make plenty of noise when approaching blind corners, dense shrubs and streams, and when moving into the wind; a loud shout every few minutes is more effective than wearing bear bells.
- It is best to leave your pets at home; however if you do travel with a pet, keep it on a leash at all times.
- Always keep your group together; be especially diligent in keeping the children in your party with you at all times.
- If you see signs of recent bear activity (i.e. fresh digging along trails, bear scat, claw marks on trees), go back the way you came; it is better to cut your trip short than to risk an encounter with a bear.
- Pack all your garbage in sealed bags.

## **If you encounter a bear:**

- **Never run;** you cannot outrun a bear and running may excite the bear and cause an attack. Back away slowly.
- Speak in monotones.
- Avoid eye contact with the bear.
- Make yourself appear larger by raising your arms or hold an object above your head.

## **If a bear charges you:**

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- Appear **non-threatening** as the bear may be simply expressing its dominance. Once satisfied by a “bluff charge”, it may retreat. (Be aware that a bear may carry out several “bluff charges” during an encounter).
- Stand your ground and speak to the bear in a normal voice.
- Avert your eyes.
- Drop your pack to distract the bear.
- Use bear spray.
- Play dead as a last resort if the bear makes contact with you.

***Play Dead.*** Lie on your stomach with legs apart and position your arms so that your hands are crossed behind your neck. This position makes you less vulnerable to being flipped over and protects your face, the back of your head and neck. *Remain still until you are sure the bear has left the area.*

These defensive attacks are generally less than two minutes in duration. If the attack continues, it may mean the attack has shifted from defensive to predatory – fight back!

**Bottom line?** It is very difficult to predict the best strategy to use in the event of a bear attack. That is why it is so important to put thought and energy into avoiding an encounter in the first place.

### **Predatory**

- *What is the bear's behaviour?*
- The bear is stalking (hunting) you along a trail and then attacks. Or, the bear attacks you at night.
- ***Try to escape into a building, a car or up a tree.***
- ***If you cannot escape, DO NOT PLAY DEAD***
- ***Use bear spray and fight back***

***Fight back!*** Intimidate the bear: shout ; hit it with a branch or a rock, do **whatever** it takes to let the bear know you are NOT easy prey. This kind of attack is very rare but it is serious because it usually means the bear is looking for food and preying on you.

### **Cougars:**

- Are most active at sunrise or sunset but will also hunt at any time of the day or night.
- When walking or biking in or near wooded areas, travel in groups, consider carrying a walking stick and pepper spray, and make noise to alert cougars of your presence.
- Avoid areas where carcasses have been left and be aware that cougars often cover their kill with forest debris.
- It is best to leave your pets at home; however if you do travel with a pet, keep it on a leash at all times.
- Always keep your group together; be especially diligent in keeping the children in your party with you at all times.

### **If you see a cougar:**

- Never approach cougars and always leave plenty of room for them to easily escape.
- Face the cougar, avoid eye contact, and slowly back away. DO NOT run or play dead.
- Gather up small children and pets.
- Stay calm; talk to the cougar in a strong, firm voice.

- Make yourself appear larger by raising your arms or hold an object above your head.

**If a cougar is aggressive:**

- Actions such as shouting, waving a stick or throwing rocks may help prevent an attack; appear as though you are another predator and not prey.
- If a cougar attacks, fight back! Use whatever is at hand to defend yourself.

**\*\* ALL wild animals are unpredictable and the above are only guidelines in the event you are faced with either a bear or a cougar. It is the responsibility of those who enter the backcountry to learn as much as possible about bears & cougars, their behaviour, and how to prevent and react to attacks. You can call Parks and Protected Areas office or Alberta Environment, Natural Resources Service office in your area.**