

WHERE ARE ALL THE BEARS?

Bears were once commonly observed along roadsides and within developed areas of Yellowstone National Park (YNP). Bears were attracted to these areas by the availability of human foods in the form of handouts and unsecured camp groceries and garbage. Although having bears readily visible along roadsides and within developed areas was very popular with the park visitors, it was also considered to be the primary cause of an average of 48 bear-caused human injuries per year from 1930 through 1969 (Cole 1974).

In 1970, YNP initiated an intensive bear management program with the objectives of restoring the grizzly bear and black bear populations to subsistence on natural forage and reducing bear-caused injuries to humans (Cole 1976, Meagher and Phillips 1983). As part of the bear management program implemented in 1970, regulations prohibiting the feeding of bears were strictly enforced, as were regulations requiring that human food be kept secured from bears. In addition, garbage cans were bear-proofed and garbage dumps within the park were closed.

Although bears are less frequently observed along roadsides and within developed areas today than in the past, many people still see bears each year. From 1979 - 2002 over 31,000 bear sightings have been reported to park managers.

Grizzly bears are active primarily during nocturnal (night time) and crepuscular (dawn and dusk) time periods (Schleyer 1983, Harting 1985, Gunther 1991). Look for grizzly bears with a high power spotting scope in open meadows just after sunrise and just before sunset. Grizzly bears are most commonly observed along the road corridor from Tower south through Canyon, Lake, and Fishing Bridge, to the East Entrance of the park. Grizzly bears are also commonly observed in the area south and east of Yellowstone Lake and in the Gallatin Mountains in the northwest corner of the park. Black bears are active primarily during crepuscular and diurnal (daylight) time periods (Mack 1988). Look for black bears in small openings within or near forested areas. Black bears are most commonly observed on the northern range along the road corridor from Mammoth east through Tower to the Northeast Entrance of the park. Black bears are also commonly observed in the Old Faithful, Madison, and Canyon areas as well as the Bechler region in the southwest corner of the park.

LITERATURE CITED

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BEAR SIGHTINGS^a REPORTED IN YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK, 1980-2002^b.

Year	Grizzly Bear		Black Bear		Unidentified Species		Total
	Sightings ^c	Sign ^d	Sightings	Sign	Sightings	Sign	
2002	887	80	641	7	54	11	1585
2001	548	44	417	5	25	24	1063
2000	579	100	422	11	56	47	1215
1999	786	226	352	68	54	53	1539
1998	736	202	482	55	61	68	1604
1997	581	57	463	17	49	130	1297
1996	611	76	373	17	50	51	1178
1995	796	86	546	20	106	54	1608
1994	704	95	795	16	137	82	1829
1993	533	111	668	33	95	93	1533
1992	455	85	536	33	87	37	1233
1991	356	121	490	31	80	44	1122
1990	471	96	549	21	88	46	1271
1989	553	131	575	38	88	71	1456
1988	659	133	753	45	135	77	1802
1987	653	106	696	27	160	96	1738
1986	841	109	754	34	172	92	2002
1985	708	43	496	10	166	62	1485
1984	704	53	451	9	125	74	1416
1983	318	42	470	14	132	32	1008
1982	339	21	506	10	101	20	997
1981	371	20	447	5	114	19	976
1980	278	6	337	3	103	15	742

^a The number of bear sightings reported each year is dependent upon park visitation, observer effort, the number of on-going bear-related research projects, availability of preferred bear foods, weather patterns, and other factors. The system was not designed to provide unduplicated samples of bear numbers. The number of bear sightings reported is not considered to be an indicator of population numbers or trends.

^b In 1993, the bear sighting reporting system was entered into a computer database allowing computer tallying of the data. Bear sighting summaries from previous years were hand tallied and therefore may differ from these updated numbers.

^c Multiple bears observed together, such as females with cubs or mating pairs, are recorded as one bear sighting report. Multiple reports obviously representing the same bear on the same day were also recorded as one sighting.

^d Sign includes tracks, scats, feeding sites, day beds, and den sites.