



**LIFE DINALP BEAR** Population level management and conservation of brown bears in northern Dinaric Mountains and the Alps



## HOW TO REACT?



Drawing: Igor Pičulin

In general, the most important rule is to stay calm and assess the situation when encountering a bear. The next steps depend on the given situation.

The most common reactions when a bear detects human presence:

- » The bear immediately leaves the area, in many cases, even before we detect the bear's presence.
- » The bear rises on its hind legs to better check the surrounding area. This is not an aggressive posture. In this case, show your presence by speaking calmly so the bear will detect human presence and retreat.

### How to behave:

- » Bears in Europe do not attack humans out of aggression, but due to fear or the sense of a threat.
- » When you spot a bear from a distance, retreat slowly from the way you came and give the bear

plenty of space to continue its route. Never run away!

- » If a bear is coming towards you and it has not yet seen you, make yourself noticed by speaking calmly and retreat slowly. Bears have poor eyesight, so the animal must identify you as a human. At the same time, let it know you are not a threat. The bear will most likely retreat immediately. In any case, keep an eye on the bear's behaviour.
- » If you encounter a bear in close proximity (even if it is a female with cubs): stop, stay calm and slowly move backwards without making sudden moves and without screaming.
- » Do not throw rocks or any object towards the bear. A bear that feels threatened may act defensively and the risk of an aggressive reaction increases.
- » In exceptional cases, a bear may perform a bluff charge without physical contact with the purpose of scaring away the unwanted visitor.
- » If a bear attacks you, never fight back. Stand still or slowly lay on the ground with your face down. Most likely the bear will stop in front of you without making any physical contact.
- » It is, however, difficult to judge whether a bear is bluffing, so pretending you are dead just before contact may show the bear that you are not a threat. When lying on the ground, put your hands around your neck to protect your head and face. Behave passively. Try to remain as quiet as possible until the attack ends. Before getting up, check if the bear is still present nearby.
- » Remember: never run away from a bear or try to climb a tree. Bears are good climbers and can reach up to 50 km/h. They will catch you up in a few meters, regardless of the type of terrain. The exception is when you are able to reach safety (e.g. a car) in a few steps.
- » Never approach bear cubs, even if they look curious or abandoned. If you spot them, retreat, because their mother is not far away.

## HOW TO BEHAVE IN BEAR AREAS

A bear standing on its hind legs is a sign of curiosity.



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The aim of this leaflet published by the LIFE DINALP BEAR project team is to provide the right answers for human-bear encounters to everyone living in or visiting bear country. Please note that there is no guarantee regarding what may happen if you encounter a bear. Our goal is to spread knowledge about brown bears and promote human-bear coexistence in the Dinaric Mountains and the Alps. To find out more about our project visit our website at [www.dinalpbear.eu](http://www.dinalpbear.eu).



## TO BEGIN WITH ...

Bears avoid encounters with humans.



The brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) is the largest carnivore in Europe and an important element in well-preserved environments. It is a charismatic species that generally evokes respect in humans. Even in areas where bears are abundant in the Dinaric Mountains and the Alps, it is not common to encounter a bear. Bears are generally very shy. They perceive humans as a threat and avoid confrontations. However, encounters may still occur. We must therefore become acquainted with the species' behaviour and know how to assess the circumstances when we encounter a bear. We should also know how to behave when visiting bear areas.

## WHICH FACTS ARE IMPORTANT TO KNOW?

A bear female with cubs has strong protection instincts.



- » Bears in Europe do not see humans as potential prey and they generally avoid close encounters.
- » Bears attack very rarely and most attacks are bluff charges.
- » Bears only attack when surprised or provoked by the approach of a person, and as a defensive reaction. The most common situations that elicit such behaviour are:
  - » *an unleashed dog provoking a bear and then seeking its owner's protection,*
  - » *approaching an injured bear,*
  - » *surprising a female with cubs at a close distance,*
  - » *surprising a bear at a close distance where it has no option to leave the area immediately,*
  - » *approaching a bear when it is feeding, and*
  - » *coming into close contact with a bear that is not afraid of humans (a habituated bear).*

## HOW DO WE BEHAVE IN BEAR AREAS?

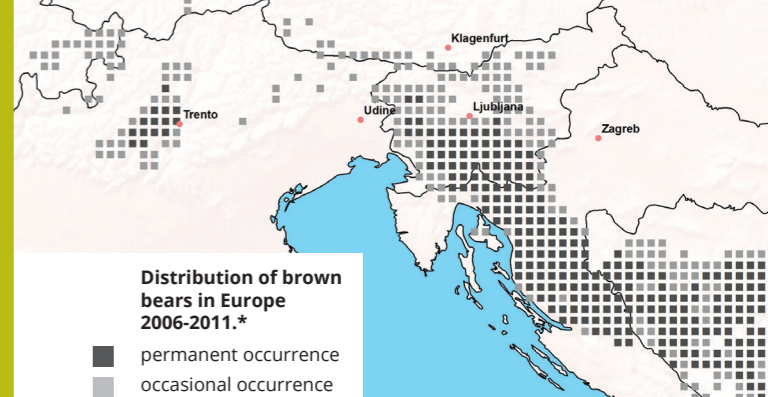
Bears attack only when surprised or provoked.

Make yourself noticeable.

Never feed a bear.



- » Similar to all wild animals, bears do not like to be surprised. They have well-developed senses of smell and hearing that help them avoid human presence. A general rule to avoid close encounters with bears is thus to eliminate the element of surprise by announcing our presence.
- » Our presence in a bear habitat should not be so silent as to surprise a bear. **Make yourself noticeable**, especially when walking through dense vegetation or in rugged terrain.
- » **Keep your dog on a leash.** If your dog comes upon a bear, it will probably rush the bear directly and lead it to you when it seeks protection.
- » If you see a bear, **never try to approach** or disturb it (e.g. by throwing rocks at it).
- » **Never feed a bear**, even if it looks calm and curious.



- » **Stay away from a bear feeding on an animal carcass or slaughter remains.** In most cases, the bear will retreat from the food source, but it may also choose to defend it from an intruder.
- » **Do not enter the vicinity of or crawl into a bear den.**
- » **Do not leave any left-over food or other organic waste in the forest or close to mountain huts or elsewhere near the forest's edge.** All garbage must be deposited in appropriate **garbage bins inaccessible to bears** or taken home. It is very important that bears do not associate food sources with human presence, one of the main problems in human-bear conflicts. **It is in our interest to maintain bears' natural shyness.**



All garbage has to be inaccessible to bears.

Keep your dog on a leash.

\* From: Kaczensky et al. 2012. Status, management and distribution of large carnivores – bear, lynx, wolf & wolverine – in Europe, EC, contract N°070307/2012/629085/SER/B3.