

Bears in Los Angeles County

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The California State Flag was created in 1911. The image of the bear on the flag was patterned after "Monarch," the last grizzly bear in captivity at Golden Gate Park.

In 1916, grizzly bears, also known as brown bears, had all but disappeared south of the Tehachapis. At the beginning of October, 1916 and for the next three weeks, campers in the Crescenta, Tujunga and Sunland areas reported seeing tracks from a very large bear. A valuable collection of beehives was damaged by a bear searching for honey and then bear tracks were discovered in vineyards in the Sunland area where a bear had been eating grapes.

To prevent further damage to their crops and for their own safety, vineyard owners rushed to Los Angeles to obtain traps to capture the bear. Once the traps were set, a hunting party headed by Cornelius Johnson spent three days searching for the bear. The bear was caught in one of the traps secured to a heavy log by a chain. Unable to free itself from the trap, the bear dragged the log for a mile into Fitzgerald Canyon. Johnson and his search party caught up to the bear and killed it. Word quickly spread that Johnson had shot and killed a three hundred pound female cinnamon bear. Johnson provided the bear meat for a barbeque that was held for the whole town at Sunland Park on October 29th.

Days after the barbeque, Johnson took the bear's pelt to a Los Angeles hide dealer. There he discovered that the bear was not a cinnamon but a silver-tip grizzly. If the bear had been captured alive it would have been worth \$1,000. This type of bear was rare and museums would have paid him \$250 for just the bones alone. Unfortunately, the bones were discarded after the barbeque. Johnson didn't walk away without earning any money, however. The bear's pelt was worth \$400 to \$600. This was the last known grizzly bear killed south of the Tehachapis.

In 1933, J. Dale Gentry, President of the Office of Fish and Game Commission representing San Bernardino, expressed a desire to have black bears relocated to the Angeles and San Bernardino Forests. A letter was written to C. G. Thomson, Superintendent of Yosemite National Park, requesting to relocate black bears from Yosemite to Los Angeles and San Bernardino County. At the time, there was an abundance of bears in the Yosemite Valley, so Superintendent Thomson agreed to have the National Park Service trap and transport the bears.

The Department of Fish and Game captured 28 black bears in November 1933. One of the bears died from injuries sustained during trapping and transportation. Eleven of the bears were released at Crystal Lake in Los Angeles County. Six bears were released near Big Bear Lake and ten in Santa Ana Canyon in San Bernardino County. There were rumors that the bears that were captured in Yosemite were the area's troublemakers that continually broke into campers' tents and raided food supplies.

In the Spring, after hibernating for months, bears emerge from their dens with one thing in mind: to eat. Their keen sense of smell allows them to detect food over great distances. They will travel for miles following the scent captured by their nose. During the summer and fall months, when there is little rainfall, the shortage of water causes bears to wander into neighborhoods searching for water. The

shortage of water also creates a shortage of food since lack of water prevents berry bushes and other sources of food from growing.

While seeking food, bears will break into homes, rummage through trashcans, destroy bird feeders and eat food left out for pets. When they are seeking water, they tend to focus on homes with swimming pools, spas or ponds. Not only do they drink the water but they also bathe in it. While searching for food, bears may be confronted by dogs in fenced yards. These confrontations may lead to a pet being injured or killed.

Throughout the years, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department patrol stations ringing the San Gabriel Mountains have received calls about bears wandering into the neighborhoods they patrol. This has been a continuous problem forcing a response by deputies. They in turn notify the Department of Fish and Game. While awaiting the arrival of Fish and Game officers, the job of deputies is to contain the bear and keep it from harming anyone. When an officer from the Department of Fish and Game arrives, they assess the situation. If possible, they scare the bear back up into the mountains. If necessary, they tranquilize the bear and once it is unconscious they load it into their truck and transport it deep into the mountains away from inhabited areas. While the bears are unconscious, they are tagged so their movement and activity can be monitored. This is the time some deputies take photographs of themselves near the bears since this is the only time it is safe.

Occasionally a mother bear along with her cubs will wander into a neighborhood seeking food. These situations are more difficult to handle. Fish and Game wardens cannot use tranquilizers on cubs since the amount of sedative in the darts used to induce sleep, will kill them. Also, tranquilizers cannot be used to sedate mother bears since the medicine will travel into the mother's milk and also kill the cubs.

Many people are not aware of the indicators a bear is ready to attack and are mauled or killed. Some of the warning signs that a bear is agitated and may be a threat are: standing on their hind legs; snarling and baring their teeth; or when they may make chomping or clacking noises while opening and closing their mouth rapidly while salivating. If a bear is aggressive toward the public, the Department of Fish and Game may be forced to euthanize the animal in the interest of public safety. If a bear attacks a citizen prior to the arrival of Fish and Game, deputies at the scene may be forced to use deadly force to protect the citizen.

When the black bears were first relocated to the San Gabriel Mountains back in 1933, the Department of Fish and Game never anticipated the problems they would create once more homes were built at the base of the mountains. Today, deputies who patrol areas along the base of the San Gabriel Mountains must be aware of safe ways to deal with the bears while protecting the public.

Research

- Frontier Days in Crescenta Valley
- Author Jo Ann Sadler
- Yosemite National Park Website
- Los Angeles Times
- Living With California Black Bears
- California Department of Fish and Game
- Sarah Watson – News Article Research