

1 Bear attacks

Visitor: Can I ask a question, please? Is it true that some years ago, a tourist was killed by a bear, right here in the park?

Park ranger: Yes, it's true. It happened more than forty years ago.

Visitor: Can you tell us more?

Park ranger: I can. At that time, visitors weren't careful with their food. There weren't the food boxes we now ask hikers to use, so that bears can't smell food a mile away. Bears have very good noses and they can smell food for miles. If you don't put your food away carefully, it attracts the bears and they might attack.

Visitor: OK, now I understand why the boxes are important.

Park ranger: But bear attacks are very rare, so you shouldn't be scared. Please remember that bears are extremely powerful animals, so you should avoid all contact with them.

Visitor: How do I know if a bear is in the area?

Park ranger: Look around carefully. If you see any fresh tracks, you know, where the bear has walked or animals they might have killed, then you know you should keep walking.

Visitor: You mean run away.

Park ranger: No, don't run. Just keep walking. Bears are faster than you. The best thing is not to go near the bears. In the summer, bears are active in the evening or in the morning and at night time. So, you just stop hiking at that time. Another thing you can do, if you think that a bear is close, you start shouting "Hey bear", so the bear can hear you coming.

Visitor: I should tell the bear that I'm coming? That doesn't sound right.

Park ranger: Most bears normally avoid humans. So, if you shout, "Hey bear", you give them time to leave the area. But if you surprise them, they think you want to attack them and then they attack you, especially when they have babies. A mother bear might attack to protect her babies.

Visitor: What happens then? Is there anything I can do when a bear attacks?

Park ranger: Don't run away. It's best to stand still and do nothing. Usually the bear stops his attack and runs away. However, if a bear gets really close to you, then you should play dead. Lie on the ground face down, protect your head with your arms and don't move. The bear thinks you're dead and leaves you alone.

Visitor: That sounds scary.

Park ranger: If bears attack people, they don't usually kill them. They might hit or bite you, but if you play dead, they often go away because they think you aren't dangerous to them. The best thing is to move in groups – most bear attacks happen when people are walking on their own – and remember the rules I've just told you. Bear attacks don't happen very often and if you're careful, the chances of being attacked by a bear are very low.