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Eight bears killed - and counting

Three instances so far this year of bears inside residents' homes

BY TESSA HOLLOWAY, NORTH SHORE NEWS AUGUST 19, 2011



The bear seen here in Blueridge in the summer of 2010 was relocated far from the North Shore, but returned this summer and was the fourth killed by conservation officers this year after rummaging through garbage in the same neighbourhood.

Photograph by: Warren Goodman

A surge of problem bears on the North Shore is causing headaches for conservation officers, as a poor berry crop has driven the animals into populated areas.

So far, eight bears have been killed on the North Shore, compared to 10 last year and one the year before.

Conservation officers and RCMP have been called to three instances where bears have entered people's houses, including one on Tuesday on Brockton Crescent in North Vancouver where a woman was trapped inside the home as the bear rummaged through the kitchen.

"It's very risky and it's not a risk we can manage. It's a level of comfort for a bear that's not acceptable," said Simon Gravel, a conservation officer with the B.C. Conservation Service, who suggested residents avoid leaving open doors unattended.

Another bear was also put down the same day in the area of Cedar Village Crescent in Lynn Valley, while two were put down last week in the Upper Capilano area. All the bears had been tagged and relocated before.

Conservation officers are trying to avoid relocating bears over long distances, as bears relocated in past years tended to either become problems in their new communities or simply returned home, said Chris Doyle with the B.C. Conservation Officer Service.

"We'll still look at it on a case by case basis, but based on some of the failures we had last year and the problems we had in some other communities, we're not doing it as much," said Doyle.

He said tagged bears from the North Shore had been seen by conservation officers digging into garbage in Lions Bay, Squamish and Whistler.

Doyle warned that this year has all the ingredients for a bad season for bear conflicts, in particular a weak berry crop due to the

unseasonably cold spring and the snowpack staying late on the mountains. "If there's attractants available they're likely to come back and get into conflicts. The end result is that some bears are going to be destroyed," he said.

Bears sneaking into garbage can also end up making themselves sick, as one Lynn Valley resident found out earlier this month.

Paul Avery was surprised to find himself babysitting a sick black bear for six hours on Aug. 9 after the bear wandered into his yard with clearly laboured breathing and moaning.

A neighbour first spotted the bear about 15 metres up a tree at around 1: 30 p.m., and Avery immediately noticed "very intense, rough breathing noises.

"I went to see it but couldn't get too close," he said. "I could hear the branches cracking. The closer I got, I realized that if the branches broke the bear would be right on me."

When the conservation officer arrived the bear had come down under the tree and laid his head down on the ground, not moving unless someone came close.

The officer tried to spook the bear by firing a blank, but then advised Avery to just watch the bear from a distance and call if anything changed, said Avery.

"Periodically I'd go out and check and the bear was still lying there and it would lift its head up," he said. "Here I was babysitting a bear."

Avery gave another call to the conservation officer, who returned again with help to capture the sick animal at about 6: 30 p.m. He watched from inside his home as the conservation officer shot the bear with a tranquilizer dart. The bear jumped into the tree again, but didn't stay for long.

"Finally when the dart kicked in, the bear fell off the tree, you could hear this thump," said Avery, who said he was impressed by the professionalism of the officer and the beauty of the animal made so helpless in his yard.

It was that bear's first run-in with the law, and he was tagged and released locally, said Doyle.

The incidents form a stark reminder that residents need to remove garbage, bird feeders and other things bears can't resist from yards, said Christine Miller of the North Shore Black Bear Network.

"It's just accessible food that keeps the bear there. Why go work hard and pick berries when all this was available?" she said.

Conservation officers in B.C. have killed 167 bears so far this year.

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