



Time for Nature



Getting a little too friendly

Managing carnivores and people at Pacific Rim National Park Reserve of Canada

Don't feed the wildlife! It's a simple message; wild animals in our national parks should be left alone. Most park visitors are conscientious, but at Pacific Rim National Park Reserve of Canada, not everyone seems to be listening.



Fatal attraction

At Pacific Rim, the number of interactions between humans and wolves or cougars has been increasing. Some park wolves, for example, show very little wariness of people and even resist attempts to scare them away.

Pacific Rim has the highest overnight usage of back country areas of any national park. © Parks Canada, Baird, D., 1979.

Uninformed visitors sometimes try to feed the animals, forgetting that these are wild creatures and potentially dangerous. Feeding aggravates the danger because the animals learn from every contact with humans. If they learn not to fear humans or to expect a handout, they can become aggressive.

In fact, feeding "is passing a death sentence on an animal," says Bob Hansen, a Wildlife-Human Conflict Specialist at Pacific Rim. Recently, park staff had to destroy a wolf that had gotten food handouts and become too aggressive.



Parks Canada believes that the key to managing human/carnivore encounters is to influence the behavior of people. This is essential, because contact is becoming increasingly common.

Some park wolves show very little wariness of people. © Parks Canada, Steve Diggon, 2004.

More and more interaction

It's unclear exactly why encounters are becoming more frequent. Certainly, more people are using our parks. And many of them are going off the beaten track. In fact, Pacific Rim has the highest overnight usage of back country areas of any national park.



Where and when encounters occur

Various other factors could be in play. What, for example, is happening to the carnivores' habitat and the availability of their prey at Pacific Rim? Vancouver Island has experienced urbanization, forest harvesting and other development. This may have altered habitat, which in turn would alter the predator-prey relationship. As a result, the movements and behavior of carnivores would change.



Visitors can enjoy Pacific Rim while respecting wildlife and helping protect the park environment. © Parks Canada, Lynch, W., 1985.

Tackling the problem

The WildCoast Research Project is addressing the issue so that people, wolves and cougars can live together in the future. Biologists are studying the carnivores and the coastal ecosystem. They aim to monitor the health of predators and prey over the long term. Social scientists are also involved. They are studying visitors' attitudes, examining their values and behavior with respect to large carnivores.



Recently, park staff had to destroy a wolf that had gotten food handouts and become too aggressive. © Parks Canada, Darren Salisbury, 2004.

Remember the message

While Parks Canada addresses the larger issues, visitors can help. Never approach a wild animal, and never attempt to feed one.

“It comes down to maintaining a healthy space and a healthy respect for animals,” says Bob Hansen.

For more information visit www.pc.gc.ca/pacificrim