

Prevention: the key to living with the black bear

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With a seemingly insatiable appetite and in the habit of taking the easy way, the black bear wants nothing more than to have access to all the various forms of food which park visitors leave behind. Indeed, garbage and table scraps represent a true feast for bears. This animal shows a surprising level of ingenuity to get at this food.

If the manager of a territory located at the heart of a forest does not place sufficient importance on waste management and on the practices of his clientele, he will soon learn the hard way. Bears will also have to pay the price for human negligence. Here are the negative consequences of poor management. First, bears will be more present in sectors frequented by the clientele, garbage cans risk being knocked over, several clients could be frightened by the presence of bears, and the accidents involving bears and humans will become increasingly frequent. Moreover, bears will have to be relocated, even killed, this after all the energies of the team will have been monopolized.

After having experienced its share of problems with the black bear, the team at Parc national des Hautes-Gorges-de-la-Rivière-Malbaie took several actions seeking to make the cohabitation of its clientele with this species both possible and safe. First of all, a full review was made of waste management practices. Food storage poles were installed in the park's campground areas not accessible to cars, garbage cans were removed from certain locations, and changes were made to waste containers and recycling bins to ensure that their content is inaccessible to bears. The challenge associated with this latter operation was to find a functional and affordable system that is compatible with the equipment of garbage collection and recycling firms.

The participation of our clientele is also essential to achieve our objectives. That is why we developed several awareness promotion tools. For example, articles on the black bear were published in the park's newsletter, posters were placed in strategic locations, an informal talk on the subject of bears was added to our discovery activities program and an awareness promotion pamphlet is systematically handed out to all campers when they arrive at the park. The aim of all these tools is to have our clientele assume greater responsibility by placing emphasis on the behaviours that should be adopted to ensure that the bear retains its innate fear of humans.

Since all of these prevention means have been put in place, our clientele and bears have been living together successfully. Indeed, no incident was reported in 2006. The team is very happy that it has successfully taken up the challenge of combining, on its territory, the action, development and protection mission shared by all Québec parks. The aforementioned means of prevention will be maintained in the future. Moreover, we will continue to monitor the activities of the bear very closely to better understand its behaviour, to act promptly and appropriately, and to adapt our management methods, if necessary.