
Polar Bear Diversionary Feeding Workshop Report



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that if you start with a supplemental feeding program, it is difficult to quit without bears being lethally affected; therefore, it will never be a short-term solution to bear issues, rather, it must be implemented with a long term commitment.

4.4. Case study: Black bears in Minnesota

(Presented by Dr. Lynn Rogers, Wildlife Research Institute)

In Minnesota the issue of habituation and food-conditioned black bears is a big concern. In one area where a campground was located near a subdivision and bear density was relatively high, bears were frequently being removed annually as bears encroached on human space. Although controversial, Dr. Lynn Rogers began to intentionally habituate and



Photo: courtesy of Lynn Rogers

and food-condition black bears to find out if bears would become more aggressive toward humans to obtain food. Dr. Rogers began to intentionally feed beef fat to bears within a ¼ mile of the campground. From his experiences he concluded that both habituation and food conditioning is very location- and situation-specific. Contrary to what has been noted elsewhere in this report, he believes that bears do not necessarily carry over experience from one situation to the next.

If given a choice, black bears in his area always selected natural foods. If a high abundance of natural food was present, fewer problems with bears occurred. However, when natural food was scarce, bears were attracted to garbage which can increase encounters with humans. Introducing a less preferred food helped keep bears away from human areas during times when preferred foods weren't available. As soon as natural food was available, introduced food was not of interest anymore and the bears that he observed moved away.

The driving force behind "problem" bears is hunger. The term habituation and food-conditioning should be used carefully and in the right context. Hunger is what makes bears food-conditioned, and they learn quickly where to find food. It is hunger that can get bears in problems, not whether they are habituated or food-conditioned. This

means that taking away supplemental food sources when natural food is available might not lead to problems, but taking it away when natural food is scarce does.

4.5. Case Study: Chukotka Diversionary Feeding of Polar Bears

(Presented by Geoff York, World Wildlife Fund, on behalf of Sergei and Vladilen Kavriy, Chukotka Russia Umky Patrol.)

The situation in eastern Russia is similar to elsewhere in the Arctic: the loss of summer sea ice is changing the distribution and movements of ice-associated animals. An increase in conflicts has been observed because more polar bears come ashore and into the villages. Also, there are more walrus hauling out in large groups immediately adjacent to coastal villages, making them more vulnerable to human disturbance and leading to stampedes that result in deaths of many animals, especially calves. These carcasses provide an attractant to polar bears which has the potential for negative outcomes, both for humans and animals.



Photo: courtesy of Sergei and Vladilen Kavriy

The inhabitants of Chukotka knew that active planning was needed to manage the increased risk from polar bears to human safety. In 2006, the Village of Vankarem approached WWF for support to reduce human-bear conflicts. They established the first Umky Patrol, whose mission was to initiate a large-scale education effort regarding bear safety, and to deter bears from villages. Additionally, they improved attractant management by moving walrus carcasses further away from town, and limiting human access to haul-outs to reduce disturbance events. WWF provided logistic support to the patrols in terms of snow machines, fuel, and a travel budget for additional training and outreach – support that continues today. Since 2006, the Umky Patrol has engaged communities, scientists, and conservationists to effectively manage emerging resource issues and build the capacity for more positive human wildlife interactions in Russia.

While “umky” is the Chukchi word for polar bear, the Patrol is equally concerned with walrus as the two species are intricately linked. Since its inception, patrol groups have expanded across Chukotka to neighboring villages and in 2010, an exchange program was initiated to share concerns and success stories between Chukotka and Alaska. The Umky Patrol’s goals are to: