

Bear Hunting Tips

One of the most common mistakes that bear hunters make is they think they can just climb into the stand, hang on and here come the bears. Bears are very shy animals for the most part and very cautious when coming to a bait site. They realize there is potential danger from predators, mainly larger bears but also wolves and of course man. Many have visited bait-sites their entire lives, some have been wounded and escaped, and others have witnessed the demise fellow bears. Careless hunters have played with them, thrown things at them and talked to or yelled at them.

A. Keeping quiet and scent free.

Because of this the hunter must make every effort to go un-noticed as much as possible. Staying as scent free and as quiet as possible is very important. The outfitter comes in on a regular basis to feed the site then leaves. The bears that frequent the site regularly may take minutes or hours to come in. The more cautious bears will circle the area using their best defenses, their nose and their ears to tell them if something is out of place. If you are lucky your outfitter has been conditioning the bears to a certain type of mosquito repellent. Otherwise skip it if possible and rely on a head-net and gloves. If they hear unusual noises such as a hunter shuffling around, going through his back-pack, zippers opening or closing, coughing or movement in noisy clothing or raingear (leave the Frog Togs home for Duck hunting) they may choose to wait and come in after dark. Just because you have seen bears while being noisy, doesn't mean you got to see all the bears you could have. The one that heard you and didn't come in could be the trophy you were after.

Once a bear has come into the bait-site and started eating they can be very hard to run off. For the most part if a bear seems very wary at the bait it is not because of you but his or her fear of other bears. I have found the best way to scare a bear away is not to yell and wave alerting all other bears and educating the bear in front of you but to simply reach around and break a limb or twigs from your tree. Do that several times pausing in between and the bear will think another bear the he has not been able to identify is coming in and he/she will leave rather than risk a thrashing by a larger bear. Many times I have seen big bears run off at the sound of what turned out to be a small bear approaching.

Big boars fight a lot and will kill young males to eliminate competition and cubs to bring their mothers back into estrous.

B. Judging bears

Different hunters are looking for different things out of a bear hunt. Most first time bear hunters will be happy with a bear of reasonable size (3 to 4 years old or better with a good hide. These types of hunters are better off booking earlier in the spring season or late in the fall season if possible when even these younger bears have excellent hides. The longer the bears have been out of the den the greater the chance that the younger bears and some of the older bears have started rubbing removing the winter fur and some of their hair with it. Late in the fall most have re-grown their winter coats and are in prime shape.

For the most part the very mature bears will maintain perfect coats year round so if you are a trophy hunter wanting only to take a large boar your chances are good anytime but could increase with the annual rut which can occur from the last week of May to the second week of June.

I am often asked "How will I know if it's a good bear"? I guess all bears over 3 years old with good hides are good bears but if you are looking for a Pope and Young or better wait for a bear that is so large that there is no way if you hoisted him into the air by his back leg that you could possibly fit him into the 50 gallon bait barrel. Also the bear almost always needs to be a boar to make the record book. Females just do not develop the head size required. (With rare exceptions). A 5 year old or older boar will likely make Pope and Young. If you can see a distinct crease or V shape on the top of the bears head it is likely a mature boar. Also mature boars tend to have facial scars from fighting.

C. The shot

The best shot at a bear is standing, quartering away, aiming for the off side shoulder or leg. Aim at the center of the bear horizontally regardless of angle. Avoid the front leg or shoulder by shooting at least 4" behind the crease if the bear is broadside and wait for the front leg to move forward. Your objective with any weapon is to take out both lungs. Forget anything you have heard about shoulder shots to break the bear down. We will go and get him for you and want a dead bear at the end of the trail.

Closing

If you are hunting with an outfitter who is interested in managing his bears you may find that they do not want colored sows shot. Many hunters will shoot a colored bears regardless of age then ask, "Why don't we see any big colored bears?" The obvious answer is because they don't get a chance to grow up.

I hope these hints have been helpful. If you have questions e-mail or call and I will help all I can.

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