

PREDATOR & WILDLIFE CAMP SAFETY GUIDE

Respect wildlife. Protect your camp.



SIGN

FOOD

CAMP

ENCOUNTERS

KNOWLEDGE • SKILL • DISCIPLINE • SURVIVAL

Independent educational field guide • verify current laws, local conditions, and expert guidance

SYSTEM PRIORITIES

START WITH THE SYSTEM

Prevent wildlife conflict through clean systems and regional knowledge

Wildlife safety begins before an encounter. Camp location, food and waste control, visibility, travel habits and current agency guidance reduce surprise and prevent animals from learning that camp provides calories.

1 Core principles

- Research the species, season and local agency recommendations for the exact region.
- Keep food, garbage, toiletries, bait, fish, game, cooking residue and other attractants controlled.
- Separate sleeping, cooking, processing and storage zones as terrain and official guidance require.
- Avoid surprising animals: maintain visibility, read fresh sign and alter travel in dense cover or low light.
- Never use one universal encounter script; appropriate response varies by species and behavior.

A clean camp is not merely tidy. It is a behavior-management system for animals with excellent noses and no respect for your organizational chart.

2 First-hour priorities

- Contact the managing wildlife agency and save current bear, predator, ungulate and food-storage guidance.
- Select camp away from carcasses, heavy game trails, dense feeding sites, poor visibility and fresh concentrated sign.
- Build an attractant inventory that includes non-food odors and processing waste.
- Define daylight and nighttime travel rules, lighting and communication.
- Practice species-specific encounter responses and prepare approved deterrents where lawful and permitted.

Food-storage regulations vary. Some areas require approved bear-resistant containers and prohibit or discourage hanging methods.

FIELD RULE

Do not wait for repeated visits. The first sign that an animal is obtaining food or becoming habituated demands an immediate camp-system correction and agency guidance.

WILDLIFE RISK AND PREVENTION MATRIX

CHOOSE DELIBERATELY

Wildlife risk and prevention matrix

Use local guidance for exact responses. This matrix focuses on universal prevention and the evidence that should change camp behavior.

Risk source	Evidence	Prevention system	Escalation
Food and cooking odor	Tracks, scat, disturbed storage, repeated approaches	Approved storage, clean cooking zone, residue control and prompt waste handling	Stop food activity and contact agency when an animal accesses attractants.
Carcass or processing site	Ravens, tracks, drag sign, strong odor or fresh kill	Avoid site; separate processing and storage; increase awareness	Leave immediately if large predator sign is fresh or animal is present.
Dense travel corridor	Heavy trails, beds, rubs, poor visibility and fresh sign	Relocate camp or route; make appropriate presence known	Change travel time or abandon route when surprise risk remains high.
Bear encounter	Bear changes route, approaches, defends food or shows stress behavior	Follow species and agency-specific guidance; do not run	Use approved deterrent and emergency action as trained and locally advised.
Large ungulate	Moose, elk, bison or deer blocks route, charges or guards young	Give wide space, never crowd, use barriers and alternate route	Leave area; seek help after injury or persistent aggressive behavior.
Small scavengers	Chewed bags, droppings, missing food or contaminated surfaces	Hard storage, clean camp, remove nesting access and protect gear	Discard contaminated food and repair entry points.
Marine or reptile hazard	Tide-zone predators, crocodilians, snakes or venomous species	Region-specific distance, lighting, footwear and site selection	Immediate medical response for bite, envenomation or attack.

Decision note: Identify whether behavior is defensive, food-conditioned, predatory, territorial or simply transit. Do not guess during a close encounter; use prelearned local guidance.

WILDLIFE-SAFE CAMP WORKFLOW

REPEATABLE BEATS HEROIC

Wildlife-safe camp workflow

Prevent attractants from entering the sleeping system, then inspect before evidence becomes a pattern.

1

ASSESS THE SITE

Look for fresh tracks, scat, feeding sign, carcasses, trails, visibility, escape routes and seasonal food sources.

2

DESIGN ZONES

Place sleeping, cooking, processing, waste and storage according to terrain and current agency recommendations.

3

CONTROL EVERY ATTRACTANT

Inventory food, trash, toiletries, bait, fish, game, grease, clothing and containers. Clean and store immediately after use.

4

TRAVEL WITH AWARENESS

Adjust for wind, noise, visibility, daylight, young animals, carcasses and fresh sign. Avoid headphones and blind approaches.

5

INSPECT AND ESCALATE

Walk the camp perimeter, record sign and secure systems. Relocate, stop food activity or contact authorities when visits repeat or behavior changes.

WILDLIFE ENCOUNTER AND CAMP SCENARIOS

ADAPT BEFORE CONDITIONS FORCE IT

Wildlife encounter and camp scenarios

Exact responses differ by animal and region. These scenarios emphasize distance, attractant control and the decision to leave early.

1 Bear sign near camp

- Determine freshness without following into cover.
- Stop cooking and processing until the site is reassessed.
- Inspect storage and residue for access.
- Follow local guidance for species and behavior.
- Relocate or seek agency direction if visits repeat or a bear obtains food.

2 Moose or large ungulate

- Give more distance than seems necessary.
- Do not position between adult and young.
- Use a substantial object as a barrier if threatened.
- Back away and choose another route.
- Treat any trampling or impact as a medical emergency.

3 Nighttime camp noise

- Wake fully and use light from a protected position.
- Do not rush blindly outside.
- Account for food, waste, pets or companions.
- Identify only from safe distance and follow regional guidance.
- Repair the attractant or access failure before returning to sleep.

4 Fish or game processing

- Choose a site away from sleeping and clean-water work.
- Keep tools, clothing and surfaces organized.
- Move edible food promptly into approved storage.
- Handle remains according to local rules and wildlife guidance.
- Increase awareness around blood, odor, birds and fresh predator sign.

FAILURE MODES AND CORRECTIONS

DIAGNOSE THE SYSTEM

Failure modes and corrections

Wildlife incidents are often preceded by ignored sign, food rewards, poor visibility or a camp design that concentrates odor near people.

Failure signal	Likely cause	Best correction
Animal returns repeatedly	Attractant remains, food reward occurred or camp sits on travel route	Stop food activity, secure every odor source, relocate and contact wildlife authorities.
Storage is damaged	Container, hang or site is inadequate for local species	Discard contaminated food, upgrade to approved storage and reassess the entire camp.
Surprise encounters increase	Dense cover, low light, quiet travel or route through feeding habitat	Change route and timing, increase awareness and avoid high-risk habitat.
Response advice conflicts	Species, region or behavior not identified	Follow the current managing-agency guidance for the exact animal and location.
Scavengers contaminate food	Soft packaging, residue, open waste or shelter access	Use hard or approved storage, clean surfaces and remove access routes.
Fear disrupts sleep and judgment	Evidence unclear, system weak or repeated visits	Verify sign, strengthen controls, seek guidance and leave when safety margin is gone.

FIELD CARD, RED FLAGS AND SOURCES

CARRY THE STANDARD

Wildlife-safe camp and encounter-prevention card

The objective is not to win an encounter. It is to keep the encounter from becoming necessary.

FIELD CHECKLIST

- ☐ Regional species and seasonal behavior researched.
- ☐ Current agency encounter and food-storage guidance saved.
- ☐ Camp is away from carcasses, dense trails and fresh concentrated sign.
- ☐ Sleeping, cooking, processing, waste and storage zones defined.
- ☐ All food and non-food attractants inventoried.
- ☐ Approved storage method used correctly.
- ☐ Cooking surfaces, pots and clothing cleaned and stored.
- ☐ Processing remains handled according to local rules.
- ☐ Perimeter and storage inspected morning and evening.
- ☐ Travel rules account for visibility, wind, young animals and low light.
- ☐ Approved deterrents are accessible and practiced where lawful.
- ☐ Relocation and emergency thresholds are prewritten.

STOP / REASSESS

Animal obtains food or repeatedly approaches people or camp.

Fresh carcass, cache, heavy predator sign or defensive animal near the route.

Food-storage system does not meet local requirements.

Large animal blocks movement, charges, stalks or shows escalating behavior.

Any bite, envenomation, crushing injury or suspected rabies exposure.

AUTHORITATIVE STARTING POINTS

National Park Service - bear safety
<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/bears/safety.htm>

National Park Service - food storage
<https://www.nps.gov/articles/bearsafetyfood.htm>

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
<https://www.fws.gov/>

CDC - wild animals and health
<https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-pets/about/wild-animals.html>

Wildlife behavior and recommended responses vary by species, region and circumstance. Follow current managing-agency guidance and local law. Keep distance, control attractants and seek emergency care after injury or exposure.