

>>Host: Hi. I'm Michael Host, host of Georgia Outdoors. This is how I open a can of sardines. This is how a black bear opens a can of sardines. We're going to find out more about black bears in Georgia coming up next

>>Male Host:

The black bear - Ursus Americanus – is a spectacular example of North American wildlife and a symbol of our country's remaining wild places. The black bear's range once included most of North America, now their range and numbers have seriously decreased - mostly due to habitat loss. These shy, secretive animals range over large areas in search of food. As their habitat is developed and sectioned off for human use, food sources often disappear. Sometimes this means the bears have to go farther out of their range which increases the odds of meeting a bear in the wild or finding a bear in your own back yard.

Seeing a bear in your yard or in the wild is not necessarily a cause for alarm, but you should use caution and always remember – Don't Feed The Bears. The chance of seeing a bear at all these days is growing thanks to the hard work of organizations like the Southern Appalachian Bear Study Group. This group includes biologists from Georgia, Tennessee, North and South Carolina who meet regularly and coordinate bear management in those regions.

Georgia is home to approximately 2000 black bears according to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, and they should know. These biologists conduct annual bear surveys and have been doing so since 1983. Coordinator

of the Black Bear Project of Georgia is Wildlife Biologist Chuck Waters.

>>Waters: Black bear population in north Georgia has been steadily increasing for a number of years. We can detect that trend through our bait station surveys as well as harvest statistics and nuisance complaints and things like that. Judging by the increase in the bear population over the last few years we're not yet at the biological carrying capacity for bears, but we're probably getting pretty darn close to the cultural carrying capacity if you will. I think we've got just about as many bears as society will tolerate.

>>Host:

One way to minimize human – bear contact is with the use of bear-proof containers for garbage.

>>Host: So are these cans located in all the state parks and WMA's in Georgia now?

>>Waters: No, no. In fact that's one of the big pushes we have right now is, is to encourage folks to replace uh their existing garbage cans or traditional garbage cans with more bear-proof designs. That really does a great job of minimizing garbage bears and uh the problems associated with them.

>>Host: Well this keeps all the bears out of the garbage but I also understand you guys are also doing things that purposely attract bears.

>>Waters: Right, right. Uh we set bait station surveys every July. In fact, let's go - let's go set some.

>>Host: Great.

>>Waters: We set bait stations out all over the mountains in north Georgia and leave them out for five days and check them and see what percentage of those stations were visited by bears and that same protocol is

used by colleagues in surrounding states so that we can compare our data on a more regional level.

>>Host: Well, our bait is set. I can't wait to come back and see just how this survey works. Those sardines are some mighty tasty treats and I know if I was a bear I'd be interested. Sardines go so well with blackberries.

>>Host: **So, Chuck this is the, the first station on the route then?**

>>Waters: **Right.**

>>Host: **That you check?**

>>Waters: **Looks like we've got a hit.**

>>Host: **We've got some evidence don't we? This is pretty interesting. Look at that. Now that- to me, you know, that's funny because you look at this. This is all wrapped up here. I mean, the lids are, the lids are peeled back. This doesn't, this does not look like bear evidence to me. This looks like a bullet hole. Doesn't look like it, too. And you look, it looks, how do you know this, this like isn't kids or something like that? How do you know?**

>>Waters: **Well, this is canine. This is where the bear's canine went through the can. Sometimes they're chewed up like bubble gum. Sometimes they're, they're hardly chewed and just licked clean, but obviously, see it's been cleaned out.**

>>Host: **Now that's almost bear like both sides, isn't it?**

>>Waters: **Just grab that and drag them out of the tree. These cans were hanging over this big tree limb here and the bear had to climb the tree to get to them and you can see the fresh claw marks all the way through the bark down into the, down into the solid wood, but it's, it's climbed a tree to get to it. This is a pretty classic hit.**

>>Host: You put those pretty high up into the trees.

>>Waters: Right.

>>Host: To actually make them go up there after them?

>>Host: Right. They have to climb the tree to get to the cans. Otherwise you don't know if, if maybe a raccoon or a possum or something like that got them or if they reach up and get them and break the string and leave with them and don't leave the cans with the telltale holes in them. You don't know if someone might have happened to cross them and cut them down.

>>Host: Well, we got luck on our first station.

>>Waters: Yeah.

>>Host: I suppose we need to check the rest of them then, don't we? I know you've got quite a bit of work to do.

>>Waters: Did you get the string?

>>Host: Yes I did.

>>Waters: We don't want to leave any trash in the woods.

>>Host: Think about uh, how many more sites do you have to check on this?

>>Waters: Sixteen.

>>Host: Sixteen more.

>>Waters: Better get going.

>>Host:
The bears that Chuck and his group monitor are wild bears. Wild bears tend to keep to themselves and shy away from humans. However, some bears are becoming habituated to human garbage and these bears can get into trouble.

>>Waters: What generally happens is bears usually don't like to come around where people are, but in periods of low food supply like in spring before the berries ripen or in late summer between the berries and the acorns bears are rambling around in search of food and it's a whole lot easier to

scrounge a Big Mac out of a garbage can than it is to turn over rotten logs for grubs or worms or something like that to eat. It's a cost-benefit. They're getting rewarded for coming around human and, and getting into human provided food and so what we try to do is to break that cycle before the bear becomes day active and needs to be relocated. We typically use trapping and relocation as a last resort. It's not good for people or bears. If you move a bear from a campground in the middle of a national forest what really have you accomplished? There's a reason it's coming there and if we can eliminate that, then we've solved the problem.

>>Host: Omar Lapp is a thru hiker on the Appalachian trail. A big achievement for anybody. He told us of his bear encounter at Low Gap Trail Shelter.

>>Lapp: This is thirty miles from the end or the beginning of the Appalachian Trail, for me it's the end. I have hiked over 2,100 miles on this trail. I'm seventy years old and it's been great. Last night we stayed at a shelter about seven miles north of here and my son and I were walking down to the shelter and here about ten foot away from the shelter was a bear! Not a great big one, but it was a grown bear and he heard us come and he just looked up and looked at us and we looked at him and then he got up and then he walked away. The one thing that I was reminded of is that people do leave food in shelters for the next hikers and that's a very friendly, nice thing to do, but it should not be done in their country because it encourages the bear to come into the shelter and to get the food and nobody wants that. The bear should be out eating the berries and not get used to eating the food that we have and also it entices them to come to the shelter and stay

around the shelter when really they should be out eating the food that they are expected to eat. So leaving food in shelters where there's, where there are bear around is not a good idea and I was reminded of that last night.

>>**Female Narrator:**

Coming up learn how to be bear safe but first meet two world-renowned and world- traveled conservationists who have come home to help save grizzly bears.

>>Host: In 1974, with nothing more than backpacks, \$6,000 of their own money and one-way air tickets Mark and Delia Owens headed off to the Kalahari Desert. They were pursuing their dream – to make a difference for wildlife in the world. For seven years they studied the elusive brown hyena and black-maned lions. They made landmark discoveries about these species and helped conserve the Central Kalahari Game Reserve.

In 1985 they moved onto the North Luangwa National Park of Zambia – here they found that gangs of commercial poachers were decimating the parks resident elephants. As many as a 1000 elephants were killed each year for their ivory. For the next 11 years, Delia and Mark developed the North Luangwa Conservation Project, which saved the park for the benefit of the wildlife and the people living near it.

>>Delia Owens: The most important thing we found is that you cannot possibly think of conserving any wildlife unless you include the local people. There's so much conflict between wildlife and people in Africa and the, the people were shooting elephants. The poachers were shooting elephants at the rate of 1,000 a year in this

national park. They had shot over 100,000 elephants in the last twelve years in this valley. And um, we just were outraged, we were just so saddened by this. We realized that the elephant population would only last about five more years at that rate. But we could not just go in and say to the people you have to stop poaching the elephants. I mean, it would make,..why?? Why should they? That was their main way of getting meat , it was their main way of getting money. They would sell their ivory for ten dollars. Although the ivory was actually worth a lot more overseas. So we came up with the idea of trying to ways for the people to benefit from the elephants still being alive. And we said you can shoot an elephant one time and make ten dollars. You can keep an elephant alive and sell it for tourists to see over and over and over again. That sounds like an easy idea, but it took us ten years to win the people over.

>>**Host:**

In 1997, Mark and Delia returned to the United States to write up their elephant research data and to put their conservation expertise to work closer to home. Delia's family is from Georgia and we caught up with her to find out what these two hard-working conservationists were up to now.

>>Delia Owens: When we came back from working in Africa for 23 years on wildlife conservation, we were amazed to find how similar the problems were in this country. We were, we went to northern Idaho, and we were helping with the fund and helping do the research on a grizzly bear project in northern Idaho and we were very amazed to find that the funding, this was a government project, and the funding was as almost as bad as was for a project in Africa. The, as far as the priorities in the county government, the state government,

and the federal government, the priorities of that project were very, very low. The community was not involved, it was looked at like something the biologists had to do because it was an endangered species. The people didn't really care about the grizzly bears. They looked at the grizzly bears as a problem, because they thought that some of the national forest could not be cut because of the endangered species act and as long as there were grizzly bears in the forests, then they would not be able to harvest some of the timber. So they thought the grizzly bears were actually taking away some of their timber jobs. And it was a very similar problem. And so we, we became involved and we started working with the Idaho Fish and Game, and we, through our foundation, through the Owens Foundation, we were able to raise some money to boost the project so that they could do more research, but also so that they could do more education.

>>Host:

Today Mark and Delia are supporting the Selkirk Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Recovery Project in the northwestern United States.

>>Delia Owens: We're working up in Northern Idaho, in the Selkirk Mountains in a small population. There are only between fifteen and thirty bears left in this population. There are many more black bears in that area. One of the main causes in mortality in grizzly bears is when hunters shoot grizzlies by mistake, and they think that they're hunting black bears and so, for some people it's very difficult to distinguish between a black bear and a grizzly bear.

>>Host:

The Selkirk ecosystem is one of the most complete grizzly bear habitats in the

lower 48 states. The Idaho Fish and Game Department has been working for 15 years to quantify the population density, reproductive biology and causes of mortality of the grizzly bears that live in these mountains. But Idaho Fish and Game operations are funded almost exclusively with revenues from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, and these funds are insufficient.

The three officers running the Selkirk Grizzly Bear Project are critically short of funds and spread far too thin for the work that needs to be done. Mark and Delia saw an opportunity where through their foundation – The Owens Foundation for Wildlife Conservation - they might help support this work.

The grizzlies will likely recover without bringing in bears from other populations – if human caused deaths and habitat losses can be contained.

>>Delia Owens: I think more people like bears than dislike bears. I think more people like wolves than dislike wolves. But it takes a commitment from all of us. Especially the people, especially the people who don't have to have the conflict. I mean it's more difficult for a rancher to like a wolf, than it is for someone who goes out to Yellowstone just for summer vacation. It's easy for them. They say, you know we love the wolves, they want to see them, but they go back to their home in Atlanta and it's not a problem. So we have to have sympathy for the people who do have to sacrifice on our behalf to save these, these species that can be a nuisance to man. And we have to try and find ways to help the people who make the sacrifice on our behalf.

>>Female Narrator:

Most black bears in Georgia are black in color, but in some parts of the country they may be brown or cinnamon. The typical life span of a black bear is about eight to fifteen years. Wild bears tend to live 23 percent longer than “garbage bears.” Adult bears are generally up to six feet in length and about three feet high at the shoulder. Female adult bears can weigh up to 300 pounds and males can weigh over 500 pounds. Bears have poor eyesight but an excellent sense of smell. They are good tree climbers, can swim well and are able to run at speeds of up to 30 miles per hour.

Cubs are born in the den in late January or February and are entirely dependent on the mother. Cubs stay with their mother throughout the first year, den with her during the following winter and stay with her until she finally drives them away the following summer. Due to this extended care for her young, females only produce a litter every two years.

Next, learn some basic bear safety tips, information on how to store items while camping and what to do if approached by a bear.

>>Hall: Her eyes got big as saucers and I said, "what's wrong?" and she said, "There's a bear behind us!" And I said, come on, and I thought she was kidding around with me.

>>Tanner: We used to feed bears yeah, he used to give us apples and let us feed them as kids. Fun memories, really didn't know the difference at the time. Learned a lot, don't do it anymore, enjoy watching them, do not feed them. That's a motto and it's a good one.

>>Oagle: At first I wasn't much afraid of it

cause, first it would come along, it usually it's path was right up through here and back into the forest, right across through here, night and day...

>>Watson: and he woke up with a bear paw on his face. He felt a hairy bear paw on his face and when he woke up he, of course he saw the bear running out through the woods out through the front of the shelter. So, that just goes to show you, you have to be real careful.

>>Hall: That bear went down to each table at each campsite and was eating and I just stayed ahead of him and that was it and that's my story, but you got to be careful with these bears, I tell ya cause he could have come after me, couldn't he? Yeah.

>>**Host:**

The Great Smoky Mountain National Park has always been a popular sight for bear watching. Many of us have childhood memories of feeding the bears in the park. Well, today we all know better...Do Not Feed The Bears. Feeding presents a threat to the safety of both the bear and humans. And dealing with bear management issues like bear-proof trash cans is Bill Stiver.

>>Stiver: Bear management is really people management. It's pretty simple. I mean, if you can manage food and garbage and smells, then, then you keep that away from bears then you won't have any problems. In a three year period from 1988 -1990, we handled thirty two bears fifty times in Chimney's Picnic area alone. Just, and it's probably one of the worst areas in North America for bear problems. So we kind of looked at Chimney's and you know thought that if we can solve the bear

problem here, then we can solve the bear problem anywhere. And the first thing we did was we replaced all the trash cans with dumpsters and one of the problems we were having is there was so many people coming to that sight that the trash cans didn't hold the volume of garbage that was being generated. The next thing we did is started patrolling the area later at night and just monitoring for bear activity and what we learned was that you know bears don't just come out from the woods one day and say that I'm going to be a nuisance animal, it's a learned behavior over time.

>>Host: Bill also works with neighboring communities like Gatlinburg, where we witnessed this mother bear and two cubs getting into all kinds of trouble at what were thought to be bear proof containers. What we're witnessing is two baby bears learning to become nuisance bears. Sometimes the only way to handle this situation is to destroy the bears.

>>Stiver:

Managing bears is not just confined to the Smoky's. I think that all bear biologists in the region, the southern Appalachian region realize it's on a regional scale. As a matter of fact, we have a group of biologists from Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, that meet twice a year. We call ourselves the Southern Appalachian Bear Study Group. We've worked with Gatlinburg, and the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency to address bears not only in the park but also in the city of Gatlinburg, and how to deal with the garbage and bears coming out of the park and into Gatlinburg and then back into the park and it's a very very complex issue. We've made some significant steps in addressing, you know, bears in the city of Gatlinburg with the ordinance for the

animal resistant containers.

>>Host: So Bill, these are the ones that we've already seen being used in the city right?

>>Stiver: Yes, they're the ones that different restaurants and different businesses are using. Over here we've got a couple of examples of the types that the homeowners can purchase. This one has a little latch system that you lift it up, trash cans sit inside, put your trash in and lower it back down and it's latched. This one here is more recessed, um again, you pick it up, put your trash inside, lower it back down and the bear can't get to it, you know, get to this to pull up on.

>>Host: Now are these in use in the city?

>>Stiver: Yes, yes. They'll either pour concrete and set it into the concrete so it can't be pushed over, or they will run some rebar stakes down and drive it into the ground where it can't be pushed over.

>>Host: Though most of us have learned not to feed bears intentionally, many of us who spend time camping in the back country must learn how to camp bear safe too. First of all, if you're backpacking, hang those packs in a tree while you're in camp. Wildlife biologists have developed food storage cable systems that are being installed in back country camping areas where bear problems have become serious.

>>Host: We're here with Rick Varner, Wildlife Biologist with the National Park Service and Rick is going to tell us and demonstrate how these cables work and help to manage bear encounters with people.

>>Varner: The Great Smoky Mountains National Park has over a hundred back country designated camp, camp sights. Every camp sight has one of these systems

Airdates: Saturday, February 3 @ 11:30 a.m.

Sunday, February 4 @ 10:30 a.m.

now.

>>Host: Well, you gonna show us how this works?

>>Varner: Sure, uh, it's a real simple system. The main uh aspect of it is that the cable is a continuous loop. One end hooks to the tree, the other end has two hooks at the top that you use to put your pack on. The pulleys on the cable are spaced inward at the minimum of at ten feet from either tree. That prevents a bear from either holding onto the tree and leaning out and grabbing a pack or we've had in the past where bears would actually climb above the rope and jump from the tree and try to catch the pack on the way down and tear it, tear it loose. And with it being ten feet out, I think that that intimidates the bear a little bit. He doesn't want to jump that far. But to operate it, you just unhook it from the tree and we go ahead and just walk to the center, and your handles, the side with your handles on it, you just pull, pull down till you get your pack loop down here. This loop right here is called the pack loop, we've got two hooks on it for two backpacks, and the loop's made big enough so it will spread out for big packs to give you plenty of room to move. And you just, most packs nowadays have some kind of a haul loop on them and you just set it down on the ground if you want. Pull it down until they run out of handles cause once they get to the colored handles, they just walk back to the tree and as they walk back the pack automatically goes on to the top and you just snap it in and it's up.

>>Host: All there is to it.

>>Varner: Of course there's some things that we like to think are uh logical safety things like don't be doing this in a lightening storm, but I, I don't know if people do it or not, but I hope they don't. But that's one of the only negative things about this system is worrying about someone hanging their little brother from

it, anything like that. If they're not using their pack and not using the stuff in their pack it should be, it should be hung up.

>>Host: Good advice.

>>Host: As a matter of fact, as an example of how regions work together on bear management, the Georgia DNR has since encouraged the Forest Service to buy this type of food storage cable system for every trail shelter on the Appalachian Trail. The Appalachian Trail Club will help to install these systems.

Once again, here's a quick rundown of the rules:

- 1. Secure all food, toothpaste, soap and trash at night or when not in use.**
- 2. Do not cook or store food in or near your tent.**
- 3. Pack out all your trash.**
- 4. If a bear approaches you, frighten it by yelling, banging pans together, or throwing rocks.**
- 5. If you are attacked, fight back and yell. Playing dead doesn't work.**

>>Waters: We haven't had a recorded human fatality due to black bears in north Georgia but with increasing human population nationwide and especially here in the southeast and the southern Appalachians there are more and more contacts between humans and bears. If you encounter a bear in the wild the best thing to do is just back away slowly and leave it alone. Let him go on about his business and you go about yours. Uh if you happen upon a bear in the woods and it changes its behavior because you're there then you're too close and you might notice things like stomping the ground. They may actually woof at you or uh even bluff charge if

you're if you're real close and they feel real threatened. See, any of those types of behaviors are too close. The best thing to do is just back away and leave them alone.

>>Host: Whether you're an outdoors enthusiast or just an unsure adventurer...

>>Host: There's two pieces of gear that you don't want to forget.

>>Host: Gear up every week for new and exciting experiences next time on Georgia Outdoors.