

SFGATE <http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Black-bears-wreaking-havoc-in-Lake-Tahoe-area-2453778.php>

Black bears wreaking havoc in Lake Tahoe area

LAKE TAHOE Restaurateur who killed one: 'It was the proverbial life flashes before your eyes'

By **Peter Fimrite** Published 4:00 am, Friday, December 10, 2010
ADVERTISEMENT



IMAGE 1 OF 4

William Hunter, inside the walk-in refrigerator of his restaurant, Bacchi's Inn, where he found a sleeping bear, one of four encounters with the same black bear. Last month he was forced to shoot and kill the aggressive 500lb black bear. In November 2010, Hunter was in the dining room of his Lake Tahoe restaurant when he came face to face with a 500-pound black bear. "He got up on his haunches behind me," said Hunter, 66, the owner of Bacchi's Inn outside Tahoe City, CA. It was the fourth bear break-in at the restaurant and Hunter's second close encounter with the same hungry bear. The bear eventually charged him, and he shot it dead.

William Hunter was in the dining room of his Lake Tahoe restaurant last month when he came face to face with a 500-pound black bear.

"He got up on his haunches behind me," said Hunter, 66, the owner of Bacchi's Inn, on Lake Forest Road about 1 1/2 miles outside Tahoe City. "There was nothing between me and where he was seated."

It was the fourth bear break-in at the restaurant and Hunter's second close encounter with the same hungry bear. The bear eventually charged him, and he shot it dead.

Black bears, normally shy around humans, have been smashing windows, yanking doors off their hinges and entering homes and businesses in the Lake Tahoe area like never before, according to the [California Department](#) of Fish and Game.

The unusually brazen bruins have rummaged through cupboards, garbage containers and refrigerators and, when confronted, have charged, swatted and pummeled homeowners and campers.

ADVERTISEMENT

Get More Done for Less

fiverr.com

Fiverr provides a simple affordable way to get work done. Try it

"To be quite frank, this year has been off the charts," said **Marc Kenyon**, Fish and Game's statewide bear coordinator.

The department has issued 62 depredation permits on the California side of Lake Tahoe this year, Kenyon said. Fourteen of those bears were captured and killed. Seven others that attacked or threatened people in the Tahoe area, which encompasses El Dorado and Placer counties, were shot by game wardens or citizens, Kenyon said. That's compared with 29 depredation permits, which allow the killing or removal of protected wildlife, in 2009.

Thousands of complaints

The bear body count is only part of the story, Kenyon said. The department has received nearly 2,000 telephone calls from Lake Tahoe residents complaining about nuisance bears, he said, and wardens have logged more than 5,200 hours handling bear issues this year.

ADVERTISEMENT

"There have been more incidents where people were approached by bears, more instances where bears were breaking into houses and more instances in which people have been bitten, swiped at or knocked down by a black bear," Kenyon said. "It's more than we've ever had as far as I can remember."

Home and car break-ins by ravenous bears have increased in many places, including Yosemite. Part of the problem is that there has been a huge increase over the past few decades in the California bear population. In 1984, there were 4,080 American black bears in the state, according to Fish and Game statistics. There are now well over 37,000 lumbering around. Experts believe hunting restrictions and a lack of predators have contributed to the population growth.

The more bears there are, the more they need to eat. Many have become dependent on the syrupy grub and garbage slop found at human campsites and cabins, Kenyon said.

Repeat visitor

Which explains the ursine prowler at Bacchi's.

Hunter said the brute tore a window out of the restaurant on Nov. 11 and raided the kitchen, gobbled a 3-gallon tub of spumoni ice cream and sampled the salami, ravioli and tortellini before sacking out in a wine box in the kitchen.

He found the snoring beast the next morning and, with help from his son and an expert from the Bear **Education** Aversion Response, or **BEAR League**, splashed ammonia on the hairy slob's face and shooed him out.

The same bear broke in twice on Nov. 15, ransacking the kitchen and devouring three tubs of ice cream. Hunter was working with Fish and Game officials and was planning to put up an electric fence when the bear returned on Nov. 20, chomping a package of veal before falling asleep on the dining room floor. Hunter said he arrived shortly after 8 a.m. and was tiptoeing around the dining room when the sleeping giant suddenly rose up behind him.

"I heard him get up," said Hunter, a former crew chief and gunner on a helicopter in the Marine Corps. "I haven't had an adrenaline rush like that since I was in Vietnam."

Hunter backed out of the room, rushed upstairs and got a shotgun and pistol, then came back down intent on scaring the bruin away. He yelled at the bear, prompting the giant to stand up on its hind legs and roar.

"He came around that table and just charged me," Hunter said. "He covered about 30 feet in three bounds. I knew bears were fast, but this was the fastest thing I'd ever seen in my life. I had no time to get the shotgun around. It was the proverbial life flashes before your eyes kind of thing."

Miraculously, Hunter said, the bear turned away at the last second.

"He was between these two tables 6 or 7 feet away when he realized he was trapped there and he reared up again and turned back toward me," Hunter said. "I wasn't going to let him get close to me. That's when I shot him."

Keeps on coming

The shotgun blast knocked the bear to the floor, but it quickly got back up.

"He moved away from me toward the fireplace, then turned back toward me," Hunter said. "I shot him again. I didn't want a wounded, mad bear out in the public."

Hunter said the bear crawled 10 or 15 feet and flopped down near the bar, where he died.

"I wasn't planning on shooting him ... but it just happened that he was in here and he was not going to leave," Hunter said. "I was in a lot of danger at the time. It was my life or the bear's life."

Hunter said he had the shakes for two hours after the incident and his blood pressure was still high the next day. It was the closest he had ever been to a bear, he said.

"I remember when I was a kid up here, there were no bears. Now the bear population is out of whack," Hunter said. "The deputy who responded told me they were having four or five break-ins a day. It's a real problem."

© 2015 Hearst Communications, Inc.

HEARST *newspapers*

[Return to Top](#)

About | [Our Company](#) [Careers](#) [Advertising](#) [Ad Choices](#) [Terms & Conditions](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Your California Privacy Rights](#)

Contact | [Customer Service](#) [Newsroom Contacts](#)

Connect | [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [Pinterest](#) [Google](#) [Instagram](#)

© Copyright 2015 Hearst Communications, Inc.