



A senseless bear killing in West Island Montreal

Description

The decision to euthanize a young bear was made for the wrong reasons

By **Georges R. Dupras**

May 29, 2021

The decision made by the Service de la Faune (MNR) to euthanize a young bear that had strayed into Montréal on May 23 was made for the wrong reasons.

Bad decision

First, humans were in no danger as the bear was up a tree, which is a defensive position for a bear. Second, officials had tranquillized the bear, allowing for time to consider other options. Third, a one-and-a-half or two-year-old bear has yet to establish a home range, making it easier to translocate. Fourth, specialists having many years of experience in bear translocation state that, if the bear is taken far enough away from the area of concern, it will not likely return¹.

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Fifth, killing, though at times necessary, is never a solution. It is an admission of failure, and in many cases, due to humankind's never-ending encroachment on natural habitats. There is also the issue of how killing animals impacts and de-sensitizes children. Lastly, though rarely admitted, the way it affects the average person.

Research – Translocation works²



Two-year-old black bears – Image: courtesy of Mike McIntosh, Bear With Us

“Translocation of nuisance black bears doesn’t affect their survival rate ². I think that it’s important to recognize that translocation can really be an effective management tool”, says Javan Bauder, who conducted his research as a postdoctoral research assistant with the Illinois Natural History Survey. “Just because you translocate nuisance individuals doesn’t mean they are going to have low survival rates”.

Researchers looked back on 38 years of data which included 1,233 marked and translocated nuisance black bears. This data was used to estimate annual mortality rates for both hunted and non-hunted reasons. The review was to estimate bear survival rates for non-translocated individuals that aren’t nuisance bears to act as a control group. The research showed that the “further away” the bears were taken, the higher the survival rate when it came to hunting and non-hunting reasons. “We were surprised at that,” Bauder said.

He figured that moving away from the sources they knew would impact their survivability. When this is not done they become more susceptible to recreational hunting and other human factors. Translocated survival for nuisance bears was lower than that of other bears when their behaviours were affected due to the proximity of their release to human settlements.

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“Our study suggests that translocation is an effective way of mitigating human-bear conflict and doesn’t seem to be reducing the survival of the bears.”

One bear specialist³ here in Canada, who has worked in this field for many years, has successfully translocated bears, including older bears. He sees no reason to suggest that a 1.5 to 2-year-old cannot be translocated with the desired results. The trick is to ensure the bear is taken far enough away from the area of concern, and that bear attractants are removed from homes and cottages.

Resources stretched and underfunded



Wildlife services are grossly underfunded and, when you factor in the vast regions each conservation officer (CO) is responsible for, things begin to fall into place.

Beyond an old boys club

It is truly sad that this province, and others, are still catering to special interest groups by practicing political conservation rather than true conservation. That said, officials in each province should recognize that they are here to respond to the needs and concerns of every citizen, regardless of where they live. Wildlife issues would better be served if each province could allocate sufficient funds to allow COs to address issues in a timely manner.

'With our present loss of species and environmental destruction, it is time to stop sacrificing true conservation in the interest of political gain (rural ridings), budgets and expediency.'

Mandatory and ongoing training for COs is required to minimize injuries and unnecessary killing. This training would include state-of-the-art technologies and a clear understanding of changing social values. Human resources should be chosen with care and those whose backgrounds and mindsets do not lend well to this specialized field should not be chosen.

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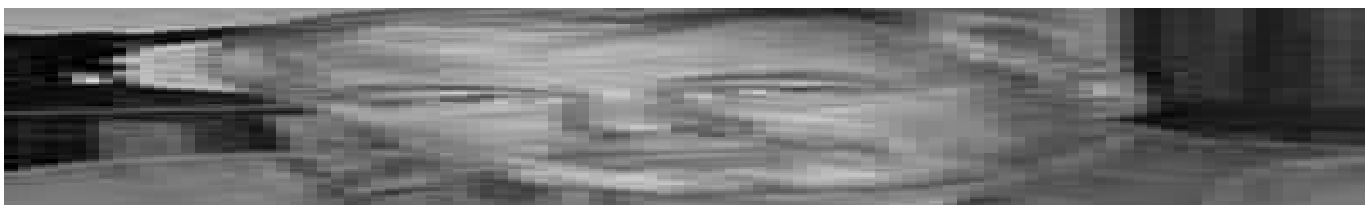
1. *See Research paragraph*
2. *Translocation of Nuisance Black Bears. Article by Dana Kobilinsky, Associate Editor for the Wildlife Society*
3. *Mike McIntosh, Bear With Us*

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Georges R. Dupras has advocated for animals for over fifty years. A member of the International Association for Bear Research and Management (IBA), a Director of the Animal Alliance of Canada (AAC), Quebec Representative of Zoocheck Canada and past Board member of the Canadian SPCA, he worked on the original Save the Seal campaign in 1966 that culminated in the founding of the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) in 1969. Georges Dupras has published two books, *Values in Conflict* and the eBook *Ethics, a Human*



Condition, and currently lives in Montreal, Canada.



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2. black bear
3. conservation
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Date Created

May 2021