

Bear sightings earlier this week in Rancho Calaveras

by Nick Baptista

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Rancho Calaveras residents apparently have a new neighbor or two on the wildlife side.

The Calaveras County Sheriff's Department dispatch center received a call at 8:04 a.m. Tuesday about a bear seen on Friedman Way and three hours later another call came in about two bears sighted in the vicinity of Dalee Road.

Sgt. Chris Hewitt, the sheriff's department's public information officer, said the matter is under the jurisdiction of the California Department of Fish and Game.

The sheriff's department usually leaves removal or killing of bears in the hands of Fish and Game unless there is an immediate public danger, Hewitt added.

Fish and Game officials were unavailable for comment Thursday morning.

Rancho Calaveras residents report seeing Fish and Game agents in the area apparently looking for the bear or bears.

No public alerts regarding the Rancho sightings have been issued by the Department of Fish and Game as on noontime Thursday.

Bear attacks are extremely rare, according to state Fish and Game's website.

The department has recorded 12 "bear attacks" since 1980. In some cases, the details of the attacks were not completely known. According to the DFG's statewide public safety guidelines, a wild animal attack is defined as "physical contact, injury or death."

The latest attack occurred in October 2003 in Mono County. A 43-year old Orange County man was struck across the face and chest by a bear at a private recreation facility in Mono Village.

According to witnesses, a sow bear, with two cubs behind her, approached the victim as he stood motionless and completely quiet next to the short stairway to his cabin. For unknown reasons the sow lunged at the victim, striking him at least once. The man sustained cuts on his eyes, cheek, and inside his mouth. The sow was later shot and killed, and the yearling cubs were allowed to disperse.

California's black bear population has increased over the past 25 years. In 1982, the statewide bear population was estimated to be between 10,000 and 15,000. The statewide black bear population today is conservatively estimated to be between 25,000 and 30,000.

The Department of Fish and Game has the following general precautions concerning bears:

Keep a close watch on children, and teach them what to do if they encounter a bear.

While hiking, make noise to avoid a surprise encounter with a bear.

Never approach a bear or pick up a bear cub.

If you encounter a bear, do not run; instead, face the animal, make noise and try to appear as large as possible.

If attacked, fight back.

If a bear attacks a person, immediately call 9-1-1.