

Book Review

Living with Bears Handbook, Expanded 2nd Edition

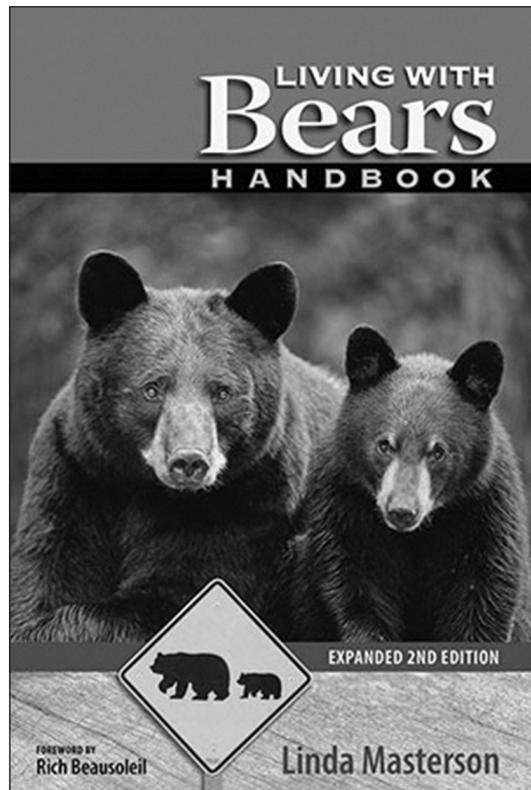
by Linda Masterson
2015, PixyJack Press
Masonville, Colorado
288 pages

Review by Lucian R. McDonald

AS GLOBAL HUMAN POPULATIONS continue to grow, more people will inevitably come into contact with wild animals, and human–wildlife conflicts will exacerbate. Wildlife attacks on humans by large carnivores will also increase as we continue to encroach on the urban–wildland interface. Thus, it is appropriate that increased human–bear conflicts are the topic of this *Human–Wildlife Interactions* special issue. Bears are among the most dangerous wild animals one can come across, yet most people have very little information on how to interact with them.

In her *Living with Bears Handbook*, Linda Masterson does a thorough job of explaining human–bear interactions and how to mitigate them. Her personal insights and experiences are valuable for anyone living or working in bear country. As a member of Colorado Parks and Wildlife’s Bear Aware program for more than a decade, Masterson has devoted her career to better managing human–bear interactions. She has shared her management experiences one-on-one and presented at many International Association for Bear Research and Management conferences and workshops.

The *Living with Bears Handbook* first focuses on general bear biology and behavior, from where they live to how they communicate with one another. Masterson then delves into a description of bear management from a manager’s perspective. She outlines the management options taken before a problem bear is finally euthanized. Before reading this book, I was unaware of how many opportunities both people and bears have to change their



behavior. According to Masterson, a bear only becomes a problem once it gets away with its transgressions multiple times.

Masterson then goes on to outline various issues that lead to bears becoming a problem in a community, including trash, bird feeders, and gardens. She then provides helpful information that could keep these bear attractants controlled. The following chapters include information on hiking, camping, fishing, driving, and photographing in bear country as well as multiple chapters on best practices for what to do when one crosses paths with a bear. Masterson’s rule of thumb is to always carry bear spray and stay alert. Depending upon the species of bear, she details how and what to communicate. She finishes the book with 2 detailed chapters describing how to build a bear-smart community through volunteering to educate the public and changing your local policies.

Throughout the book, Masterson prescribes behavioral change for the humans involved in possible bear interactions. Thus, this book should be required reading in every school and every wildlife manager in bear country. Unfortunately, many humans are resistant to change, so it may take a rude awakening to solve the problem bear issue.

To help the non-believers grasp reality, Masterson has woven short stories throughout the book to evoke an emotional response to guide the reader to perform best practices if they wish to save the lives of bears where they live. These passages are compelling. I, for one, will definitely be keeping my trash cans locked and my bird feeders put away during future bear feeding seasons.

While the book is highly descriptive and necessarily repetitive, it is not technical. There are many helpful maps, tables, and pictures throughout the book, but it is definitely written for a mass audience, which I applaud. The book is accompanied by the website LivingWithBears.com, which has similar resources for dealing with bear conflicts. Overall, I highly recommend the *Living with Bears Handbook* to any wildlife manager or conservation staff member working in bear country as a useful reference tool for explaining bear interactions to the public. Hopefully more books like this will be written to help improve human–wildlife interactions.

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LUCIAN R. McDONALD is a graduate research assistant at Utah State University studying moose movement and moose–vehicle collisions in south-central Alaska in pursuit of a master's degree in wildlife biology. He received his bachelor's degree in wildlife, fisheries, and aquaculture science at Mississippi State University and is an associate wildlife biologist.

