

# 4 LEGGED RESCUERS

Year 2, volume 1  
February 15th 2009

## The Truth About Bear Attacks



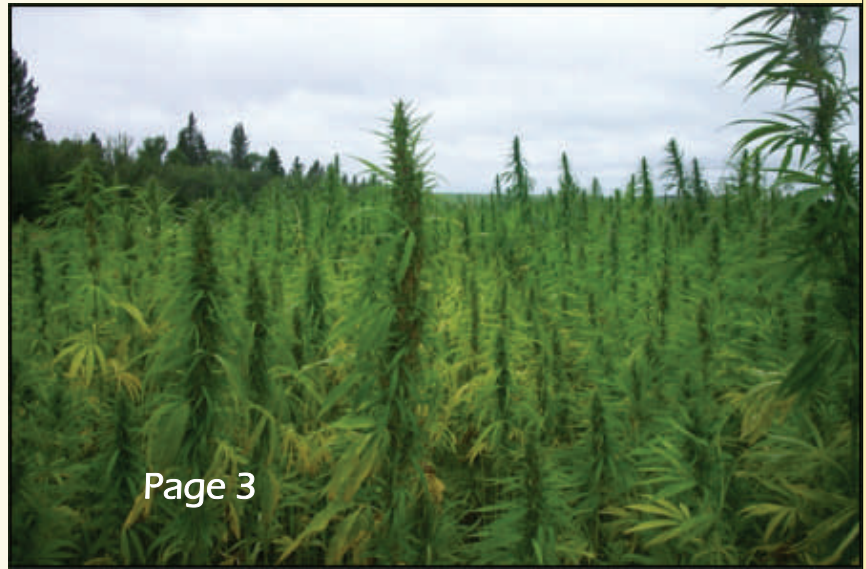
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**Cannabis cultivations, your security comes first**

# Summary

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On December 22<sup>nd</sup> 2008, Donna Molnar of Hamilton was found alive after spending three days under the snow.

See page 7.

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**The 4 Legged Rescuer is now available on the AQBRs web site:**  
 The Quebec association of search and rescue volunteers (AQBRs) has made this newsletter available on their web site. You will be able to access all of the editions at the following address:  
 Thank you to the members of the board of the association.  
<http://www.aqbrs.ca>

**In the next edition: (may 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009)**  
 In response to your many requests, there will be an article on preserving material clues at a crime scene.

## CANNABIS CULTIVATIONS, YOUR SECURITY COMES FIRST

For nature lovers like us, what could be more pleasant than exploring areas in search of new challenges? Unfortunately, we may be met with the unpleasant surprise of stumbling upon a crop of cannabis.

### The problem:

Despite the fact that within the framework of *operation Cisaille*, the various police services are combining their efforts against it, the phenomenon of the production of cannabis is constantly expanding. They are unable to curb this expansion that represents a veritable gold mine for criminal organizations. Outdoor crops require very little investment or maintenance but the returns are enormous.

The leaves from a single shoot that cost \$4 will fetch \$1000 when the plant has reached maturity. This is what makes it such a risk to accidentally come across a field of cannabis.

The people who tell stories about farmers being chased off of their own property are not making them up. It is a sad but true fact. Happily, the frequent presence of search and rescue groups in an area has the effect of discouraging the "pot" growers. This is certainly true for areas used for regular training (a good argument for obtaining the use of a new area for training).

### Where are they found?

In certain regions of Quebec, it is cornfields that are favored for the planting of marijuana. The two plants grow at a similar rate and the marijuana benefits from the fertilizer and regular watering.

In forests, the cultivators generally choose spots that are seldom frequented, are wide-open and irrigated such as near a river or a swampy area.

When approaching an area of high risk, rescuers should be on the lookout for signs that could indicate the presence of a cultivation for example trees that have been cut down, bags of gardening soil or fertilizer, plastic pots, pails, shovels, water pumps or a rough encampment.

What you must be most on the lookout for however is the possibility of traps, meant for the most part to dissuade

potential "thieves of the plants". As much as they are rare, traps present a risk to the security of rescuers or to anyone else who may venture too close to a marijuana plantation.

### Safety tips

As the time to harvest the plants approaches (September or October), criminal organizations are twice as vigilant in their efforts to avoid having their crop stolen. More and more often, we are seeing armed guards who chase away any intruders.

*« Do not attempt to play the role of the police »*

If you suspect the presence of a plantation, **do not attempt to play the role of the police**. Try to remember as many as possible of the signs that you observed and leave discreetly using the same route that you used to enter the area. Also try to note the location of the crop and communicate it to the police.

During a search operation, make sure to be accompanied by the police and leave the checking out of the immediate area to them. Above all, do not touch anything. Consider your own safety first: more and more we are seeing violent behavior around marijuana cultivations. Be aware that the person that you are searching for may have had a fatal run in with someone who was guarding the crop.

### What does it look like?

I often tell the joke that cannabis is the only plant in the forest that grows in



pots.

There are more than 400 types of cannabis and the rate of growth varies. The leaf is long, thin and lacey. It generally has 5 veins on each leaf. The plant gives off a distinctive odor, similar to that of a skunk. At maturity, the plant produces a fruit similar to the one seen in this photo. It is mostly from this fruit that marijuana is produced.

The cannabis plant is easily identified



from high above due to its soft green color. Thus, during search operations, a helicopter can be an important tool.

### If you are confronted:

Explain to the person that you are there for humanitarian reasons. Call for backup. Make sure that you are easily identifiable by wearing a uniform and by having your dog wear a security vest.

### Prevention:

The Quebec Provincial Police offer this



type of sign to property owners. This tool is a great help in sending the message, "not in my backyard". Why not place one in the areas where you train? Invite a police officer in your region to come and meet your volunteers in order to discuss the safety measures that can be adopted.

**Guy Lapointe**

# THE TRUTH ABOUT BEAR ATTACKS

## Exaggerated Fear of Bears

Are there more bear attacks than previously? The answer is probably no. What is certain is that every attack is now known, scrutinized under a microscope and broadcasted to the entire planet. People have the impression that bear attacks are happening more and more frequently; that bears have become less tolerant towards humans and that circulating in the forest is now truly perilous (a roman arena). Nowadays, a bear sighting is sadly, no longer seen as an unforgettable experience but rather as a potential danger regardless of what it was doing or where it was seen. This article is addressed to those who regularly circulate in the woods and who are susceptible to running into or surprising a bear. The advice given here is not aimed at the aspects related to the attraction for bears of human food. It attempts instead to help us to understand the behavior of bears so as to be able to anticipate its reactions when faced with a human.



## The behavior of bears and dogs

Bears hear sounds from all directions very well due to the mobility of their ears. They also have an excellent sense of smell although it is directional. The bear must turn its head to know where the odor is coming from. They are also great swimmers and runners. Bears and dogs share all of these abilities but unlike them, bears are not territorial and consequently are not inclined to attack an intruder to defend their turf. They can get into it with another bear who comes too close to them or their favorite food source but not with humans who are not part of their social system. For every person killed by a bear in North America, there are 45 who are killed by dogs.

Contrary to dogs, bears flee or climb trees when they feel threatened. The size of the pursuer is not important. Even a small dog can cause a bear to flee. When surprised, they communicate their fear through body language. Usually they start by flattening their ears. They clack their jaws together and also make intimidating charges consisting of a short run towards the person and of tapping the ground with both front paws and at the same time huffing strongly. These charges are inoffensive but very effective in discouraging any attempt to go further. They are not a prelude to a fatal attack but rather a sign of nervousness. Bears do not growl and show their teeth the way that dogs do (except in films). They don't raise their hackles either. When they rise up on their hind legs it's not to be better able to pounce on their prey but more to capture a scent or identify the source of a noise.

When two bears meet and wish to establish dominance over the other, they do it mostly by means of vocalization and body language. They stare at each other and the first to lower the eyes and turn the head is the loser. The winner often chases his adversary to give him a good fright and to discourage him from trying again. It's for this reason that the experts recommend that you don't stare directly at a bear when the meeting is non-aggressive since this can provoke the anger of a bear that was peaceful up to that moment and to the contrary, it is a good idea to do it when a bear is aggressive and on the point of attacking. It is also why it is not advisable to turn your back on a bear and run since the bear can interpret this as a sign of weakness and encourage his desire to dominate. What we must understand from these recommendations is that if the animal is surprised and anxious, one must react in a way so as to lessen his fear. On the other hand, if the bear sees us as prey and really wants to take us, then our best chance of survival is to use the same body language that bears that want to establish and defend their hierarchy do. I admit that it is a risky play and I'm not sure that everyone of us has the courage and cool headedness to meet such a situation. But they say that fear gives us wings...

### What causes a bear to attack?

There are two types of bear attacks: defensive attacks (e.g. a female protecting its young, or a bear protecting its food source) and offensive attacks (e.g. a bear who takes a human for prey). The recommendations of experts vary depending on the circumstances and the type of attack that is being faced. Following are the cases most likely to occur when walking in the woods, either alone or with a dog.

#### The bear is surprised, approached too closely or makes intimidation charges...

With animals as with humans there exists a distance that can be qualified as “personal space” that each individual naturally tries to maintain between themselves and others. This distance can vary between one and fifty meters depending on the situation, the species of animal involved or the state in which it finds itself (female with its young, wounded animal). A sudden intrusion into this “protected” space by a human or a dog can be interpreted as a threat. Depending on its temperament, the animal may flee to re-establish its “personal space” or will make the intruder flee by threatening and chasing it for short distances or by using intimidation charges.

To avoid surprising a bear it is recommended that we make noise as we move. The well-known bell or any other object that clangs is used for this purpose (don't forget that bears have excellent hearing). The dog's barking can have the same effect. If the bear still hasn't detected your presence, stay calm, admire it from a distance and then leave quietly.



Make a big detour to avoid the area where he is or wait until he leaves the area. If the bear is far off and has just heard you or seen an unidentified form, stop walking and alert the bear to your presence (bears have poor distance vision). Speak to it in a normal tone of voice. Move your arms slowly so that he can identify you as human. Once this recognition is made, you can quietly retrace your steps to find a safe haven or to make a detour to avoid it. Keep an eye on it to observe its reaction. Leave it plenty of space so it can avoid you. Don't corner it. At this stage, keep your dog on a leash.

If the bear comes toward you or rises up on its hind legs to help to identify you, continue to let him know that you are human. Distance yourself from him while continuing to speak softly. If he continues to advance toward you, distract it by dropping a bag or headgear. Hang onto other items that could serve to protect you later on (e.g. an axe, stick, backpack). You must not run! If you do, the bear may be encouraged to give chase, to mistake you for prey or as an intruder. If despite these precautions the bear does not leave, it is a dangerous situation. Perhaps the bear has still not identified you and is still trying to by coming closer or again, it has decided to make you flee by using threats or intimidation charges. Watch the bears ears, the more that they are flattened to the skull, the more agitated and concerned he is about your presence. In this situation, the bear is caught short and reacts with a defensive reflex. Even if the bear is threatening you, you can still defuse this aggressiveness by quietly distancing yourself, by talking and dropping something in front of you. At this stage, show the least threatening demeanor that you can.

If this fails to work and the bear is extremely aggressive (perhaps you have misjudged who you are dealing with), pretend to be dead. The bear will no longer see you as a threat and will abandon pursuit. It is recommended that one lie on the ground rolled up in a ball to protect the stomach and stay completely still. You can also climb a tree if there happens to be one large enough and with sufficient branches nearby. This will offer a 50% chance of success since the bear, don't forget, is an excellent climber. Cayenne pepper is also called for in this situation. Having sprayed the pepper into the eyes of the bear, run as fast as possible and find a secure shelter. You can release your dog. If it is courageous, it will confront the bear with loud barking and may cause it to flee. If on the other hand the dog is more frightened than you are, if he stays quiet or even lies still on the ground, he is of little use to you unless the bear decides to go at him instead of you. In such a case, use the diversion to flee. Do not try to pull your dog from the bears grasp. You will not be up to the task and are putting your own life at risk.

A female with cubs is approached too closely (defensive)

All bears defend their cubs aggressively. Thus they are dangerous and you should never get too near. If a female is surprised by or finds herself separated momentarily from her cubs by a human, she will react by charging aggressively in the direction of the "intruder". Her degree of aggression will depend on the situation. If her cub can climb a tree and it is possible for her to stay at the base of the tree, the situation would seem less critical and less desperate to her and her reaction could be less virulent. The problem with this kind of individual is that we seldom see their young, since they have already been warned of the presence of an intruder. Without the presence of the cubs, it is difficult to tell that we are involved with a female and even more difficult to distance ourselves from them since we can't see them or that we have not seen them at all. The usual advice, that says that we should avoid placing ourselves between the female and her cubs, becomes particularly hard to observe in this case. A female that is defending her young is very agile. She has a tendency to salivate excessively. To defend yourself, use the same methods of defense noted above.

A bear defending an abundant food source (defensive)

Bears will also attack to defend a source of food and will stay near their food supply until it is entirely consumed. This is why one must be prudent when approaching the carcass of a dead animal; a pile of bait or a dump nears the wild. If you are searching for a lost person, a bear could also aggressively defend their cadaver. Follow the same rules noted above.

The bear considers a human to be prey (offensive)

In rare cases, bears may consider humans to be a food source. A bear acting as a predator will show no fear and will approach its "prey" by either walking quickly or running toward it. The predatory bear may also follow a person over a long distance or circle them using cautious movements. It is important to note that young bears may also adopt the same type of behavior, being curious and having had little experience with humans. They are attempting to identify the intruder by following at a distance in the forest and circling around it to capture the scent. A curious bear will not vocalize at all and will leave the area as soon as it has completed its identification.

A bear that is hunting a human will be seen as determined and threatening. Contrary to a young bear attempting to identify you, he will vocalize. This is a case of an offensive attack. In this type of offensive situation, it is preferable to face the bear. Try to intimidate it in by attempting to appear to be dominant. Bang objects together and raise your voice. Move your arms vigorously. Hold a coat, a branch or bag over your head or jump in the air to appear to be taller. These methods work if the bear is still afraid of humans. If it does not seem to be intimidated and approaches you, face him and defend yourself. Use your fists, rocks, a stick, an oar or an axe to defend yourself. Get behind something, a rock or a tree, and use it as a shield. If you can climb a tree, do so but there is no guarantee of the success of this desperate maneuver. Release your dog in the hope that he still has good hunting instincts. Discharge your pepper spray at the bear's eyes and muzzle. It is not recommended that you play dead when faced with an offensive attack since this will simply make the bear's task easier.

**In conclusion**

The advice given by the experts were not obtained through experiments done in enclosures or through actual encounters in the forest. These are so rare that a single person would never be able to experience and document all the possible reactions and appropriate recommendations in his lifetime. It is through the analysis of documented attacks and observation of the bear's behavior among its own kind that these recommendations have come to be. Of course this is a lot to memorize. It is also uncertain that when meeting a bear, we will be calm and cool-headed enough to analyze its reactions and classify them as offensive or defensive. Scientists count on the fact that in a difficult situation the subconscious works effectively to bring the proper survival instincts up to the level of the conscious mind. This is why it is recommended that the general rules for safety issued by a competent authority be reviewed each time that we go on an excursion. If in a group, discuss among yourselves how to coordinate your actions in the event of a surprise meeting.

**Madame Hélène Jolicoeur**

Biologist

Department of Natural Resources and Wildlife

## CHRISTMAS MIRACLE

Dave Walker, K9 team coordinator for the Hamilton Ontario police department, has a good reason to be especially proud and he shares the success story of one of his volunteer k9 teams with us. Dave Walker calls this story "The Christmas Miracle".

Last Friday, the 19<sup>th</sup> of December, a Hamilton area man called police to notify them that his wife, 55-year-old Donna Molnar had disappeared. The weather was deteriorating rapidly and police wasted no time in starting search efforts.



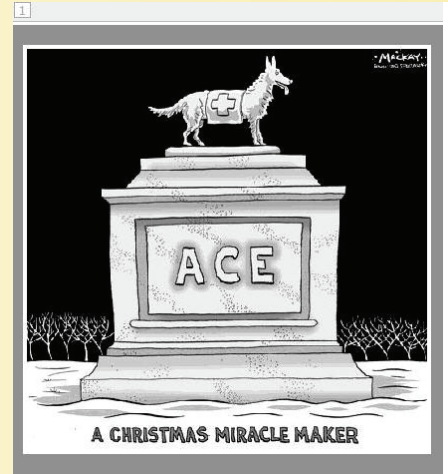
The following day, police found her vehicle. Systematic search efforts were undertaken. Twenty trained volunteers using snow-

mobiles and all terrain vehicles assisted police. They covered several square kilometers but despite all their efforts the woman was not found.

On December 22<sup>nd</sup>, the k9 team of Ray Lau and his dog Ace were called in to help. Of course, considering the weather conditions and the amount of time that had passed, they had little hope of finding the lady alive.

That day, around 1230 PM, Ace gave an alert, scratching lightly at the surface of the snow. Ray, being attentive to his dog's signals, began to dig and found the woman buried under the snow. She was semi-conscious and could barely speak, suffering from hypothermia. Donna Molnar is recovering slowly from her misadventure and considers herself lucky to have survived the ordeal.

Of course, the story has been around the world.



This story had a happy ending. Once again a K9 team made the difference, it makes no difference whether it was professional or volunteer.

**Guy Lapointe**

## MORE NEWS ON THE ACCREDITATION NORMS

In January, the new accreditation standards for K9 teams were made available by the Quebec association of search and rescue volunteers (AQBRS). The documents can be found on their web site:

[www.aqbrs.ca/index\\_Normes\\_K9.htm](http://www.aqbrs.ca/index_Normes_K9.htm)

In the first two newsletters, I updated you on the progress of this file. Throughout 2008, discussions took place between the groups and the provincial authorities. The goal of these new norms is to define the minimum common standards that the member groups of AQBRS agree to respect during training, certification and service work of their K9 teams.

The new standards will be put in place gradually over 2009 as and when teams use them for certification or recertification. As of the end of the year, the association will recognize only teams that are certified under the new norms.

### Recognition:

As a team goes through the different steps in training to become operational, it acquires experience in search and rescue. This apprenticeship is evaluated during the stages of certification and is recognized by the award of a distinct status.

- ◆ *K9 team in training*
- ◆ *K9 team level 1*
- ◆ *K9 team operational*

### List of certified K9 teams:

The AQBRS will give a list of the groups who have certified K9 teams to the authorities who request it.

You will find all the explanatory documentation on the AQBRS web site:

- ◆ Standards Version 1.2
- ◆ Request for evaluation form
- ◆ Evaluation of different levels form

- ◆ Request for recertification form

Congratulations to the members of the board of AQBRS for their excellent work.

**Guy Lapointe**



## 4 LEGGED RESCUERS

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*Share your experiences...*

Thank you!

You believe in the importance of good communications? Help us to improve this newsletter. Share your interesting stories with us. Make yourself known. Send us your articles, photos, recommended reading, questions etc...

Share this newsletter with all the search and rescue dog handlers who you know.

Should you wish to have your name added or deleted from our mailing list, please send us an email.

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## SUGGESTED READING

In certain cases, the treatment of our pet's minor health problems can be done at home so as to avoid stressing the animal unnecessarily.

It's with this in mind that Dr. Amy Marder put together the book titled **Doctor's Book of Home Remedies for Dogs and Cats**. The book offers over 1000 remedies for the minor health and behavioral problems of your pet.

While reading this manual, you will learn to distinguish among the various health problems that your animal may encounter, those that require a professional consultation and those that can be treated at home.

As well as health problems, the author, Dr. Amy Marder also offers solutions for behavioral problems.

Using her guidelines, will allow you to quickly recognize the times when you should see a veterinarian.

You will find suggestions on the following points:

Contents for a first aid kit;  
Health problems;  
Behavioral problems.

This book has been translated under the title: *Remèdes Maison Pour Chiens et Chats*. Made available by Modus Vivendi Publications Inc.

