



## Capturing and Handling Grizzly Bears

Biologists capture and handle many different species of wildlife in order to learn more about their biology and behaviour. Captured animals are always treated with great care and respect.

When biologists capture and handle grizzly bears, it is safer for the animal and the handlers if the bear is relaxed and unaware of what is going on. Using drugs to put an animal into a sleep-like state is the most widely accepted, humane way of handling large, powerful animals.



Biologists tranquilize grizzly bears either from the air or on the ground using a dart gun. In areas where there are lots of trees, biologists use tube traps to capture the bears before tranquilizing them. These traps are anchored to a tree or other structure. They are designed to keep the bear safe and injury free while reducing the chances of other animals being caught. A strong scent is used to attract bears into the trap where they are held until the biologists are able to tranquilize them.

In more open areas biologist can use a helicopter to capture bears. Helicopters are used because biologists need to be within 30 feet of the animal to inject the drugs and keep the animal on safe ground. Biologists generally don't do aerial captures when the temperature is above 15°C so that there is no risk of the bear overheating. After the bear is darted, the helicopter and capture crew stay close to the bear while the drug starts to take effect. This usually takes about 5 minutes.

All the darting is done by biologists who have extensive experience capturing large animals and have special training in wildlife handling and drugging. A drug often used to capture grizzly bears in many parts of the world, including the Yukon, is called Telazol. It is considered to be very safe for the animal as well as safe for the humans who handle it. Another drug used is Medetomidine. This is a newer drug and is more potent than Telazol. These drugs are sometimes used together and allow biologists to use smaller amounts of drugs. Biologists can reverse the effects of this drug combination by injecting another type of drug. This means that if there are any problems, the bear can be woken up quickly.

When bears are captured using these drugs, it is very easy to tell when they are beginning to fall asleep. The drug allows them to breathe normally. Normal breathing helps to keep their body temperature at the right level so that they don't get too hot or stressed by the

capture. Biologists usually have about an hour to do their work before a bear will begin to wake up and move their head. Within another few hours the bears are usually back on their feet.

Measurements and biological samples taken when the bears are captured provide information on their age, sex, size, and general health. Captured bears are also fitted with VHF-radio, GPS (geographic positioning system) or satellite collars. Collars have been used in the Yukon to study wolves, muskox, wolverine, moose and caribou, as well as grizzly bears. Biologists monitor collared animals over time to learn about population size, reproduction and survival rates, movement, and habitat use in different seasons of the year. It would not be possible for biologists to get this kind of information without using collars.



The drugs used to put bears asleep are very safe. Its affects are not long lasting and it doesn't build up in the environment. If a bear that has been drugged is killed or dies soon after handling, any animal eating it might feel sleepy for a few hours, but would unlikely die or be seriously injured. However, as an added safety measure, people are advised not to eat any animal that has been directly tranquilized with Telazol.

Only rarely do animals die from drug or capture complications. These deaths are difficult to prevent as they are usually a result of poor body condition, a bad reaction to the drug or stress. Every effort is made to keep handling time as short as possible. The drugged animal is closely monitored for vital signs (heart rate, breathing rate and circulation) when it is being handled.

If a dart used to inject the drug misses the animal or falls out, every effort is made to find it. In most cases the drug is probably discharged into the ground or air and is empty except for some residue. A person would have to be directly injected with the drug for it to cause serious effects. However, if you find a dart, **DO NOT TOUCH IT**. Mark the location and contact the nearest wildlife office.



Government of Yukon, Department of Environment, can provide more information about capturing and handling grizzly bears. Contact Ramona Maraj, Carnivore Biologist, Whitehorse, (867) 393-7423, [ramona.maraj@gov.yk.ca](mailto:ramona.maraj@gov.yk.ca) (toll free 1-800-661-0408) or the Regional Biologist in your area.

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