



Capturing and Handling Grizzly Bears

Many different wildlife species are captured and handled by biologists in order to learn more about the biology and behaviour of the animal. Often animals are fitted with VHF-radio, GPS (geographic positioning system) or satellite collars as part of a study. Using collars to track bears helps biologists count population sizes and learn about where these animals spend time in different seasons of the year. Collars have been used in the Yukon to study wolves, muskox, wolverine, moose and caribou, as well as grizzly bears, to show movements and habitat use that would otherwise not be possible to measure.

Animals are treated with respect and great care when they are captured and handled. For the wellbeing of the animal and the safety of the handlers, it is best that the animal be relaxed and unaware of what is going on when it is handled. Using drugs to put an animal into a sleep-like state is the most widely accepted, humane way of handling large, powerful animals.



Grizzly bears can be captured any time of year, except when they are in their dens. A helicopter is used when doing the capture work because biologists need to be within 30 feet of the animal to inject the drugs and keep the animal on safe ground. 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 by biologists 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 a reversal drug, so that if there are any problems, the bear can be woken up quickly.

Biologists never capture bears when the temperature is above 10°C. If the temperatures get too hot during the day, bears have to be captured early in the morning or late in the evening when it is cooler. This helps to prevent the animal overheating.

The helicopter and crew stay close to the bear while the drug starts to take effect. This usually takes about 5 minutes. 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.

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.

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.



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 (toll free 1-800-661-0408) or the Regional Biologist in your area.

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