# Cases From Our Clinic: Bears and Berries

*Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff*

In Northern Wisconsin, there are acres and acres of wild raspberries, and it's a yearly tradition for all to find them and feast on them. As you drive down our county roads and highways during berry season, you'll often see cars parked on the roadside. In the ditch, families are busy filling their buckets with fresh ripe berries, picked just a few feet from the asphalt.

On one such afternoon, two of our very good clients and their Golden Retriever, Ranger, were harvesting berries in a large patch found on an old, one-lane logging road. Ranger was famous in our practice for always staring at our treat jar and not moving until he received his reward. Then, and only then, would he leave the clinic.

About two hours into their picking, John noticed movement in the bushes at his feet. To his surprise, he saw a tiny black bear cub! Realizing that the mother was probably in close proximity, he calmly told Mary to immediately make her way to their SUV. He called Ranger, too. About the time John and Mary reached the vehicle safely, the sow bear must have realized that her family was not alone. She did the natural thing, which was to charge into the bushes to protect her young from the intruders.

When her charge was accompanied by loud growls and jaw snapping directed at Ranger, he also did the natural thing, which was to turn around and confront whatever was coming at him in an effort protect the humans he loved.

John started honking the horn and drove the SUV into the berry patch, in the direction of the commotion.

John told me later that he assumed their dog would be killed by the sow. The vehicle and its noise scared the cubs, and they bolted. Their mother must have seen them go and realized they were out of danger, so she quickly followed the cubs. The fight was over.

Ranger was a large Golden weighing a little over 100 pounds. A female black bear can easily go over 300 pounds, is equipped with long claws and teeth, and is one of the strongest animals found in the Northwoods. Needless to say, it wasn't a fight between equals.

When Ranger was brought into our clinic 15 minutes later, it was obvious he had lost a fight. The skin on the right side of his face, from the front of the eye to the back of the ear, was badly torn and hung down



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6 to 7 inches. This gash continued back across the left side of his chest, and a lobe of his lungs protruded out between two ribs. His right front leg was obviously broken below the elbow. His abdomen had been torn open, and the intestines were being held inside by Mary using a towel! There were many other cuts and abrasions, but what was really amazing was that the dog walked, albeit limping, into the clinic under its own power. As I looked at the animal, I was immediately struck with the thought that any human with similar injuries would look at themselves, probably go into shock and simply die.

Ranger was immediately placed on intravenous fluids, antibiotics, pain medications and given medications to prevent him from going into shock. In surgery, it was obvious that the portion of lung tissue that protruded outward between the ribs was too badly damaged to save and was therefore removed and the chest wall repaired. Additionally, the injured sections of the intestines were removed and the normal portions were rejoined back together in an end to end fashion. Quickly the skin over the face was tacked down... Ranger made it through these procedures and, unbelievably, rested comfortably through the night. Over the next few days, the broken bones and various skin lesions were repaired and after several weeks, Ranger was back to himself.

The point we would like you to take from this case: dogs are amazingly tough animals that can suffer severe injuries and recover quickly when they get prompt medical attention. Most veterinarians are amazed when they themselves undergo surgery and then realize firsthand how long we humans take to recover.

Ranger was a lucky dog. His owners were very surprised by and thankful for his recovery.



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