

BEAR ATTACK ON A WOMAN IN ASTURIAS, NORTHERN SPAIN, IN MAY 2021.

Clarification of events and correcting inaccurate reporting.

Several newspapers have featured the recent attack by a brown bear on a woman in Asturias in northern Spain (eg., <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/15125905/bear-attack-woman-asturias-spain/>). Unfortunately, much of the information currently circulating is not always accurate.

On May 30th 2021 at 9:40 p.m. (at sunset) a bear attacked a 75-year-old woman in Cangas del Narcea municipality (Asturias region), in the western Cantabrian Mountains. The woman was taking a walk on the paved road by herself. A bear that apparently was going to cross the road met her, clawed her face and ran away immediately. As a result of her fall, the woman broke her pelvis. The wounds on her face are mild. She had a few tears in her nose and lip that required some stitches, her false teeth were damaged and she lost an additional tooth.

These are the facts, according to a report of the Civil Guard and to the field work of wardens of the Fundacion Oso Pardo (Brown Bear Foundation), who assessed the bear tracks and other evidence *in situ* and interviewed the daughter of the woman attacked and other witnesses. Many other details described by the media are inaccurate. For example, it is not true that the bear grabbed the woman by one leg and tried to drag her into the bushes. It is incorrect that this action was prevented by the woman's companions, since she was walking alone. Some people saw the incident from afar and came to the woman's aid when the bear had already disappeared. Their assistance was limited to phoning emergency services. The Asturian regional government has never declared their intention of removing the bear, mainly because no one knows which bear caused the attack.

This attack has the same characteristics as the seven previous attacks recorded in the Cantabrian Mountains in the last 30 years, all of which resulted in minor or moderate injuries: a bear suddenly encounters a person, makes an attack with restrained aggressiveness that lasts a few seconds and runs away. There are some differences in this case. This is the first attack recorded in recent decades in the western Cantabrian subpopulation, despite the fact that the number of bears is 6 times higher there than in the eastern one. All the previous attacks took place in the backcountry, on men who were walking off roads or paths. In this case, the attack occurred one km from a village on a person walking on a paved road. And also this is the first attack whose victim is a woman. Her age and the fact that she is a well-known local villager, have unleashed an exaggerated alarm about the safety of the inhabitants of rural areas, which had not happened in the wake of previous attacks. In contrast, both the attacked woman and her family have avoided dramatizing the situation.

The inaccurate details about this event were apparently first reported by a local newspaper from Asturias. Although these inaccuracies have been denied several times, they have been later spread by many other newspapers, both in Spain and abroad. It seems very difficult to stop the transmission of sensational fake news when they are so attractive to readers.

In the Cantabrian Mountains there is an endangered population of some 330 brown bears, which have been recovering from the verge of extinction during the last 20 years. Cangas del

Narcea is one of the municipalities of Asturias where bears reach higher densities. In addition, there is another small population in the Pyrenees (more than 60 bears) that is shared with France.

The Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe, June 2021.