

Scat App calls on citizen scientists in Jasper Park



By [Dene Moore](#) | [Daily Brew](#) – 3 hours ago



A demonstration of how hikers can become citizen scientists in Jasper Park this summer.

Back country enthusiasts, get ready to scoop some poop for science.

Parks Canada and the Foothills Research Institute are launching a pilot project this summer enlisting citizen scientists to help them learn about the bear populations in Jasper Park.

Sean Kinney, spokesman for Foothills, says hikers, outdoor enthusiasts and anyone who will be out in the park could help biologists learn more about the bruin population.

“That’s the beauty with citizen science – people are keen. They have an interest in what’s going on,” he tells *Yahoo Canada News*.

Reported sightings don’t provide enough information to estimate population or recognize trends. DNA analysis of scat samples can tell researchers how many bears might be in the park, what kind and reveal trends in the populations.

And, of course, there’s an app for that. It’s called the [Grizzly Scat App](#) and its icon is a steaming pile of poo.

“The idea of being able to download a smartphone app before you head out and throw a few vials in your pack and when you see scat, take a quick sample and drop it off ... for us it saves us a lot of time and a lot of effort,” Kinney says.

Not to mention money.

Traditionally, biologists set up barbed wire hair snags baited with scent to lure the bears. The bruins aren’t harmed but they do snag their fur on the barbed wire as they investigate, leaving DNA deposits behind.

Researchers then collect samples from as many as 100 such sites several times throughout the survey period – a labour-intensive and expensive undertaking.

Foothills designed the app and test kits based on a highly successful program in Scandinavia.

They carried out a small pilot project last fall in Bear Management Area 3, just outside Jasper Park. Information from that

trial run will be released this summer.

“The feedback we got on the app and the concept is this is great. It has the potential to allow citizens to survey bear management areas of the province in real time,” Kinney says.

The first province-wide population surveys were done between 2004 and 2008. This latest round will allow biologists to compare then and now.

They’re targeting specific areas. Test kits available from four collection depots near the park include labelled vials about the size of an old film canister.

Each vial has a unique QR code and comes with a stick to collect a sample about the size of the tip of a pinkie finger. Silica beads inside will dry the scat before it’s sent away for DNA testing.

Turning over the turds is not the end of it for citizen scientists, either. They can follow their feces throughout the process.

“We’ll let you know when it’s sent to the lab, when it’s been processed, when we get it back, what the results were – was it a black bear or a grizzly bear, it is a bear that we’ve known?” Kinney says.

They expect the program will be as successful in Alberta as it has been in Sweden and elsewhere around the world, where excursions like shark-tagging and conservation tourism have taken off.

“To be able to come somewhere and contribute to science, I think, is really cool,” Kinney says.

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