

# Know the BEAR FACTS

## Black Bears in New Jersey



New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife

# Know the Bear Facts

Native to New Jersey, black bears are the largest land mammal in the Garden State. Their prime habitat consists of mixed hardwood forests, dense swamps and forested wetlands. Nearly wiped out a century ago by habitat destruction and indiscriminate killing, black bears today are thriving, particularly in the northwestern area of the state. Their range is expanding south and east and black bears have been sighted in all of New Jersey's 21 counties.

The mere presence of a black bear is not considered a problem. Generally, bears tend to be wary of humans. Residents may observe bears near their homes. It is important not to leave out any food that may encourage bears to linger in residential areas.

Black bears learn very quickly. Bears that are fed intentionally – or unintentionally by carelessly leaving out food or garbage – will associate food with people. These bears can become a nuisance or aggressive and may have to be destroyed.

You can help to prevent problems with black bears by following some simple tips when at home, camping, hunting, fishing, hiking or whenever outdoors in areas with large black bear populations.



## When Hiking and Fishing... (For more information see "If You Encounter a Bear...")

- Normal noise made walking on a trail should alert a bear to your presence, prompting it to leave before you see it.
- Use caution in areas where bears are likely to venture, such as berry patches.
- Never leave fish entrails on shorelines of lakes or streams. Sink entrails in deep water.
- If you see a bear, use common sense. Never approach the animal; observe it only from a distance.
- If you see a bear, make it aware of your presence by clapping, talking, singing or making other noise.
- If you encounter a bear at close range, remain standing, avoid direct eye contact, back up slowly and speak in a calm, assertive voice.



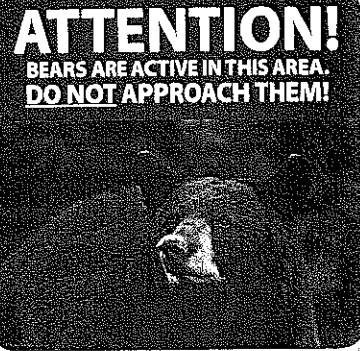
**Remember: Never feed bears!**  
**It's illegal in New Jersey, and it's dangerous.**

Report black bear damage or nuisance behavior to local police or to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Division of Fish and Wildlife at **1 (877) WARN DEP (1-877-927-6337)**.

For more information on New Jersey's black bears, visit **[www.NJFishandWildlife.com](http://www.NJFishandWildlife.com)**

# If You Encounter a Bear...

- Do not feed or approach the bear! Bears are wild animals and their behavior can be unpredictable.
- Remain calm and make the bear aware of your presence by speaking in a loud, assertive voice, singing, clapping your hands or making other noises.
- Keep your distance and make sure the bear has an escape route.
- Avoid direct eye contact, which may be perceived by a bear as a challenge. Never run from a bear. Instead, slowly back away. If you are with someone else, stay together in a group.
- To scare the bear away, make loud noises by yelling, banging pots and pans, knocking rocks together or using an airhorn. Make yourself look as big as possible by waving your arms. If you are with someone else, stand close together with your arms raised above your head.
- The bear may utter a series of huffs, swat the ground and make popping sounds by snapping its jaws. These are warning signs that you are too close. Slowly back away, avoid direct eye contact and do not run.
- If a bear stands on its hind legs or moves closer, it may be trying to get a better view or detect scents in the air. It usually is not a threatening behavior.
- Black bears will sometimes "bluff charge" when cornered, threatened or attempting to steal food. Stand your ground, avoid direct eye contact and then slowly back away. Do not run.
- If the bear will not leave, slowly back away and head for nearby shelter. **DO NOT RUN** and do not turn away from the bear.



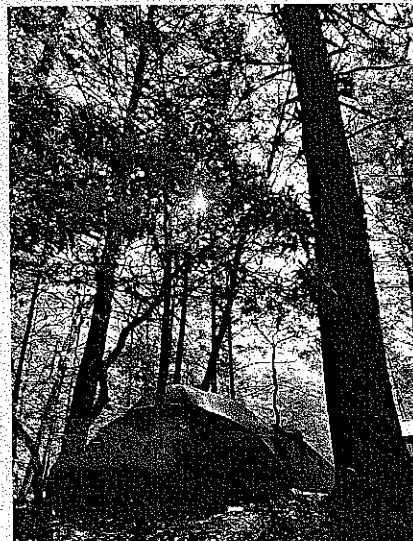
- If the bear approaches you or persistently follows you, stand your ground and make yourself look as big as possible and yell in a loud assertive voice, then slowly back away. Toss non-food objects such as rocks or stout sticks at the bear. If people are nearby, call to them for assistance. Notify the police if the bear continues to approach.
- Black bear attacks are rare, however they do occur. If a black bear does attack, fight back! Use whatever means you have available and try to punch and kick it in the face, nose and eyes if possible.

**Remember: Immediately notify local police or the DEP's Division of Fish and Wildlife at 1 (877) WARN DEP, if you encounter an aggressive bear.**

## Bear Facts for Camping

To fully enjoy your outdoor experience when camping, follow these common-sense safety tips:

- Keep a clean camp. Bears have an acute sense of smell. Food, and all items that come in contact with food, gives off odors that can attract bears.
- Store food immediately in airtight containers after every use. Coolers are not airtight and bears often associate them with food. Keep coolers locked in a trunk or concealed in the vehicle's cab.



- Do not eat or cook in your tent. Never store food items or scented toiletries, such as soap, deodorant or toothpaste in tents, sleeping bags or backpacks.
- Avoid having leftover food by cooking only as much as you will eat at a meal.

# Bear Facts for Homeowners

- ☞ Taking steps to avoid attracting bears with food or garbage is the best way to prevent black bears from becoming a nuisance near your home.
- ☞ For the best protection, use certified, bear-resistant garbage containers if you live in an area frequented by black bears. Otherwise, store all garbage in containers with tight-fitting lids and place them within a secure location where bears are unlikely to see or smell them, like the inside walls of your garage or in the basement.
- ☞ Wash garbage containers frequently with a disinfectant solution to remove odors.
- ☞ Put out garbage on collection day, not the night before.
- ☞ Clean up after pets. If you feed them outside, do so during daylight hours only. Pick up any leftover food and remove bowls immediately after they have finished.
- ☞ Clean outdoor grills and utensils thoroughly after each use and store grills securely. Grease and food residue attract bears.
- ☞ Do not place meat, dairy or any sweet foods in compost piles.
- ☞ Avoid feeding birds if you live in an area frequented by black bears. Birdseed attracts bears. If you choose to feed birds, do so during daylight hours only between December 1 and April 1, when bears are least active. Suspend feeders from a free-hanging wire, making sure the bottoms are at least 10 feet off the ground. Bring feeders indoors at night. Clean up spilled seeds and shells.
- ☞ Avoid leaving corn out to feed deer or other wildlife, which may attract bears.
- ☞ Pick up any fruit or nuts around homes that fall from trees and dispose of it in bear-resistant garbage containers.

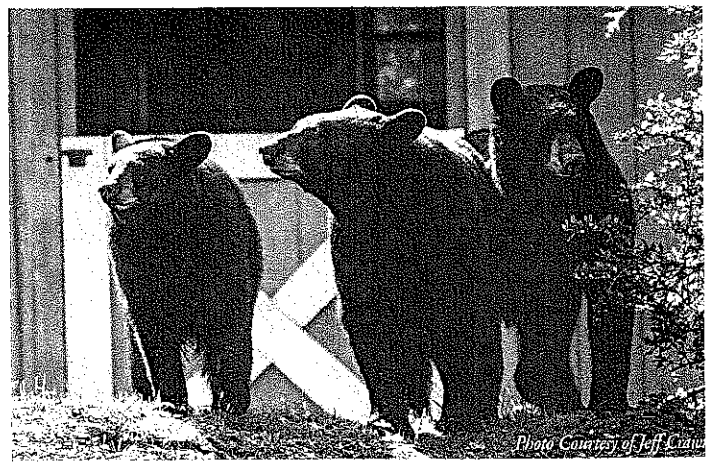
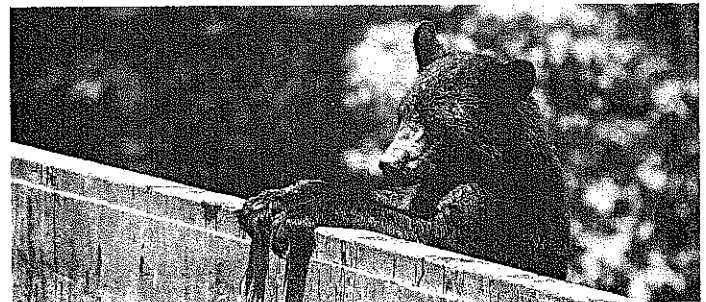


Photo Courtesy of Jeff Crain

- ☞ Consider installing electric fencing to protect crops, beehives, livestock, orchards, gardens, compost piles and standard dumpsters if you live in an area frequented by black bears. In order to be effective, fencing must be properly installed, baited and maintained.
- ☞ Families who live in areas frequented by black bears should have a "Bear Plan" in place for children, with an escape route and planned use of whistles and air horns.

**Remember: One person feeding bears can create problems for the entire neighborhood**



## Business Owners...

Trash in dumpsters can attract bears, which may cause an unsafe environment and create an unintentional means of feeding bears. Use certified bear-resistant garbage dumpsters, which offer the best protection. Otherwise, contact your sanitation department to request a bear-resistant dumpster, preferably with metal lids.

- Clean grills and all utensils thoroughly. Never put food or food residue in campfires or fire pits.
- Place garbage in airtight containers or bear-resistant dumpsters. Do not burn garbage or bury it.
- Keep dogs on a leash and remove leftover food after your dog has finished eating.
- Never attempt to feed or approach a bear. It is very dangerous and may result in personal harm or harm to others.

• Report all bear damage and nuisance incidents immediately to your camp office, local police or the DEP's Division of Fish and Wildlife at 1 (877) WARN DEP.

**Remember: Keep a clean campsite to prevent attracting bears while camping.**



## Did You Know?

- ❖ Black bears are usually solitary animals that are most active at dawn and dusk.
- ❖ Black bears have excellent senses of smell and hearing.
- ❖ Black bears can run up to 35 miles per hour. They are strong swimmers and excellent climbers. Both adults and cubs will climb trees for food and to escape disturbances.
- ❖ Black bears eat both plants and animals. Their diet mostly consists of skunk cabbage, berries, wild cherries, acorns and beechnuts. They also eat insects, small mammals and dead animals.
- ❖ Black bears are opportunistic feeders and will supplement their diet with food or garbage left out by people.
- ❖ Adult females average 185 pounds; adult males average 400 pounds.
- ❖ Not all black bears are black. Across North America, they can be brown, cinnamon, blonde, white and even gray-blue! Fifteen percent of New Jersey's bears have a white chest blaze.
- ❖ Black bears are not true hibernators. In their winter den, they enter a period of dormancy, called torpor, to avoid severe weather and food shortages. Den sites include rock cavities, brush piles, open ground nests and hollow trees. Bears may leave their den if disturbed or in search of food on mild winter days.
- ❖ Breeding season runs from late May until August. The average litter size is three cubs weighing about 8 to 16 ounces each. Cubs remain with their mother until she breeds again.

Front Cover Photo Courtesy of Jeff Cannon

