Living with Vermont's Black Bears

USFWS

Black bears are found in most forested portions of Vermont. They generally rely on wild foods such as berries, cherries, beechnuts, and acorns to survive. However, as humans move into bear habitat, bears can become attracted to other foods such as birdseed, garbage, and pet food. You can help the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department maintain a healthy bear population by reducing the chance you will attract bears to your property.

Bird feeders, barbecue grills, garbage, and dirty campsites can become appealing food sources. They also are deadly – the bear could be struck by a motor vehicle in a populated area, illegally shot, or have to be destroyed. When a bear is being fed (directly or indirectly), its life expectancy is cut by as much as one-half.

Black bears are normally shy and not aggressive to humans. However, a bear that has been fed by humans loses this shyness and can become a potential danger to human safety. When this occurs, there is often little recourse except to destroy the bear.

Let's Avoid Conflict

Follow these guidelines to decrease the chance of conflicts with bears:

- Dispose of garbage frequently. Store it in clean, secure containers (top-latched, tied, or chained). Don't put garbage out at the curb the night before pickup.
- Feed pets indoors.
- Keep barbecue grills clean and stored inside.
- Don't feed birds from April 1 to December 1 if you live in an area where there are bears. If you see or suspect a bear near your home, remove your bird feeders for at least four weeks or until the bear is no longer in the area.
- If you have livestock, dispose of animal carcasses immediately by burying or incinerating.
- Store food in air-tight containers and inside a vehicle, or hung from a tree at least ten feet from the ground and six feet away from the main trunk of the tree when camping.
- Support protecting and enhancing natural food sources in areas away from human habitation. For more information about how you can help enhance bear habitat, contact your local Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department office.

Above all, **REMEMBER**

A FED BEAR IS A DEAD BEAR!

Visit these websites to learn more about black bears:

Be Bear Aware - www.centerforwildlifeinformation.org/BeBearAware/bebearaware.html

Bear Wise - www.mnr.gov.on.ca/en/Business/Bearwise/

Help is Available

Persons suffering bear damage are urged to contact the nearest Vermont Fish & Wildlife office or local state game warden prior to taking any control action on their own. Fish & Wildlife personnel will recommend appropriate preventive measures or control strategies that can lessen the problem.

Producers of bees/honey, corn, fruit orchards, and livestock interested in learning more about the symptoms of bear damage, its identification, what to do if damage occurs, and where to go for assistance should contact their local Vermont Fish & Wildlife office or local game warden.

For More Information, Contact the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department:

Waterbury – (802) 241-3700
103 South Main Street, 10 South
Waterbury, VT 05671-0501

Barre – (802) 476-0199
5 Perry Street, Suite 40
Barre, VT 05641-4266

Essex Junction – (802) 878-1564
111 West Street
Essex Junction, VT 05452-4695

Rutland – (802) 786-0040
271 North Main Street, Suite 215
Rutland, VT 05701

Springfield – (802) 885-8855
100 Mineral Street, Suite 302
Springfield, VT 05156-3168

St. Johnsbury – (802) 751-0110
1229 Portland Street, Suite 201
St. Johnsbury, VT 05819-2099

The black bear, *Ursus americanus*, is the smallest of the three bear species found in North America. It is the only bear found in Vermont.

Vermont's black bear population is currently estimated at between 4,600 and 5,700 bears. The highest numbers of bears can be found in the center spine of the Green Mountains, from Massachusetts to Canada, and in the northeastern part of Vermont.

The best habitat for black bears in Vermont is a mixture of coniferous trees, hardwoods, wetlands, and variation in terrain. Because they need dense cover to escape danger, the wary and elusive black bears prefer rough and wooded habitats. Coniferous trees provide concealment and protection from severe weather. Stands of beech and oak, along with wetlands, are important feeding areas for bears.

Live weights for adult female black bears in Vermont average between 120 and 180 pounds. In contrast, male black bears are generally larger, weighing 300-400 pounds.

Black bears have an excellent sense of smell and hearing. However, their eyesight is not as well developed.

"Bears keep me humble. They help me to keep the world in perspective and to understand where I fit on the spectrum of life." — Wayne Lynch ("Bears, Monarchs of the Northern Wilderness", 1993)

VERMONT
Agency of Natural Resources
Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department
103 South Main Street, 10 South
Waterbury, VT 05671-0501
www.vtfishandwildlife.com

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