

So what do I do... if I see a bear?

And other commonly asked questions

In these rare instances, the answer depends on whether you are in their natural habitat or in a residential area. Keep in mind; bears are generally timid, nonaggressive, and afraid of people.

In their natural habitat:

- Encountering a bear in the wild is not that common. Most people are thrilled to see one.
- Take a picture or do nothing.
- Allow the bear to walk away.
- Don't corner the bear.
- Don't feed the bear!
- You can also frighten the bear away by waving your arms, stomping your feet, and yelling.
- Treasure the moment.

In residential areas:

- Most bears are just passing through. Do nothing.
- Don't feed the bear!
- To discourage them; you can use basic aversive conditioning techniques. Start intense and vary your tactics.
- Examples of basic aversive conditioning: Wave your arms, open an umbrella, stomp your feet, yell, use air horns, shake coins in a tin can, banging pots and pans, turn on garden hose, blow whistles, make loud noises, etc. Be creative.

How do bears help the environment?

Black bears eat the larvae of insects, such as Eastern Tent caterpillars that defoliate ornamental trees. The tent caterpillars are also associated with Mare Reproductive Loss Syndrome, a condition in horses that causes pregnant mares to lose their fetuses. Bear scat is a natural fertilizer. Their scat also contains the seeds from the fruits and plants they eat. These seeds help regenerate the forest understory. Black bears help keep the forests continually growing with new oxygen-cleaning plant life, which is vital for forest health. In fact, this is crucial for ALL life in New Jersey.

Are black bears overpopulating?

There is no scientific data anywhere that shows that black bears are overpopulated. Based on the quality and availability of food, black bears typically have their first litters between 3-11 years of age. Because of a unique phenomenon known as "delayed implantation," bear embryos will not become implanted if the female bear has not accumulated sufficient fat reserves to survive the winter. This is nature's way of regulating the population, the hallmark of a self-regulating species. By preventing access to unnatural food sources such as garbage, we can ensure population control.

What do you advise parents to do when bears are seen in residential areas?

It is always wise to supervise your children, no matter where you live. Black bears are naturally wary of humans and are a gentle species. Despite the fact that black bears are timid, their size and behavior may be frightening to some. If you have just purchased or are considering purchasing a home in "bear country" learning about the true nature of black bears and becoming Bear Smart is essential. Fortunately, this is easy. The Bear Education And Resource Program offers free presentations at libraries, schools, club houses, civic associations, and private residences. We also offer personal home evaluations on bear proofing. Please call our hotline at 973-315-3219 for more information.

How do I prevent bears from entering my neighborhood?

It's easy. Become a Bear Smart community by visiting BearSmartNJ.org to learn the 3 Simple Steps: Contain, Implement, and Educate. Through these simple measures and basic education the incidence of human/bear interactions can be greatly reduced. A fully effective Bear Smart community requires participation on the part of homeowners, businesses, schools, campgrounds, community leaders, and public policy makers.



Why do you say that killing "problem bears" and the bear hunt does not work?

Some people think that killing individual "problem" bears or a large number of bears through a regulated hunt will reduce bear complaints. This is simply not true. For example, in Pennsylvania over more than 3,000 bears are killed annually, yet bear complaints continue to rise. The bear population is dependent upon available habitat and food supplies.

Killing a bear in a neighborhood opens up that territory for a new bear to move in within a matter of a few weeks. This is because the killings do not address the root causes of conflicts and nuisance complaints, which are people who provide attractants that lure bears into residential neighborhoods.

The most effective, proven solution is to eliminate attractants and use bear-resistant trash cans. This helps keep bears in their natural habitat. Bears who are "trained" to know they can't get into your neighbor's trash will be your best allies in securing their territory and warding off "untrained" bears.

What is this category system I keep hearing about?

The New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) developed the "category system" of labeling bears in 2000, shortly after then Governor Whitman asked the New Jersey Fish and Game Council to cancel a 37-day bear hunt. This subjective system is highly controversial, as it does not consider human irresponsibility or the fact that bears are typically exhibiting normal behavior in all three categories. Moreover, bears exhibiting no aggression have been labeled Category I and killed for property damage related to attractants.

- **Category I** – Bears who are perceived to be an immediate threat to life and property. These bears can be killed immediately or trapped to be killed by division personnel, law enforcement, and park rangers. A bear coming within 10 feet of a house is considered a Category I bear even if the homeowner is responsible for attracting the bear.
- **Category II** – "Nuisance" bears who are not a threat to life and property. Aversive conditioning techniques are applied. Please note that DFW's promotion of baiting for deer and bears reduces the effectiveness of aversive conditioning techniques and habituates the bears to unnatural food sources.
- **Category III** – Bears exhibiting normal behavior. As stated before bears are typically exhibiting normal behavior in all three categories.



How long do cubs stay with their mothers?

Cubs are dependent upon their mothers for 18 – 24 months, learning how to:

- run and climb to escape danger;
- forage for food, and;
- locate a den.

A mother bear disperses her yearlings during the mating season in May or June. At first, the mother

is torn between her yearlings and a male bear in the area, but within a day after dispersal, she will chase her yearlings away whenever she encounters them. This is often a troubling time for the yearlings, as they settle into their own territory. Initially, they stay within the mother's home range, spending long periods of time up trees. By the end of the summer, they are fully capable of being on their own.

What happens to orphaned bears?

Within the first year, cub mortality normally averages 30%. This number is much higher without the protection of their mother.

According to the Government of the Canadian Northwest Territories:

"Young bears are extremely vulnerable during their first year alone and mortality is high. Without the protection of their mother, yearlings are susceptible to the attacks of large male bears, and with their lack of foraging experience they are easily attracted by food at dumps and campsites, and may end up being shot as "nuisance bears.""



Bear Proofing Tips

- Enclose garbage in an airtight plastic bag and place in a bear-resistant garbage can
- Freeze pungent food scraps such as meat and fish and keep indoors until day of garbage pickup
- Store soiled diapers indoors until trash day
- Periodically clean your trash can with ammonia : food containers before putting in trash or recycle
- Remove all attractants from your property. Clear BBQ grills immediately after use
- Feed birds only between November and April
- Hang feeders at least 12' high between sturdy posts or trees, and clean up any fallen seed
- Keep sweets, meat or fish out of your compost
- Use lime to reduce compost odors
- Companion animals should not be fed outside, chained, or left unattended. Obey leash laws
- Use electric fencing to protect caged and penned companion animals (such as rabbits, goats and chickens), beehives, and valuable trees. Remove all leftover food from cages, pens, and kennels
- Pick ripe fruit from trees and clean up fallen fruit
- Don't leave groceries or other attractants, such as garbage in your vehicles, garages, sheds, decks, or screened porches
- Comply with NJSA 23:2A-14, the black bear feeding ban law
- Teach children to respect and stay away from all wild animals



Where can I purchase bear-resistant cans?

Locally:

Glenwild Garden Center
104 Glenwild Avenue, Bloomingdale, NJ 07403
Phone: 973-838-0174

Highlands General Store
111 Highland Lakes Rd, Highland Lakes, NJ 07422
Phone: 973-764-4541

Pequannock Feed & Pet Supply
85 Marshall Hill Rd, West Milford, NJ 07480
Phone: 973-728-5151

McAfee Hardware
16 Old Rudetown Rd, Vernon, NJ 07462
Phone: 973-827-0594

By Mail Order:

Bearicuda® Bins
PO Box 56, 3 West Street, Suite 3E
Litchfield, CT 06759-0056
Phone: 877-232-7428
www.bearicuda.com



How do I chase bears from my yard?



conditioning reinforces the bear's natural fear and territorial instincts. When used properly, aversively conditioned bears quickly learn which behaviors and areas are unacceptable. Aversive conditioning is a nationally and internationally recognized method.

Please note that aversive conditioning's effectiveness can be significantly reduced by baiting deer and bears, a practice used by hunters and promoted by DFW.

- yell;
- use air horns;
- shake coins in a tin can;
- bang pots and pans;
- turn on garden hose;
- blow whistles;
- make loud noises; and
- be creative.

Being assertive towards the bears through body language (waving your arms, stomping your feet and yelling) will also be very helpful in teaching them to fear YOU.

If a bear is in your yard, take the appropriate steps to chase him off. Allowing a bear to linger while you hide in the house only teaches him that HE is the boss, not you.

Make whatever efforts with which you are comfortable to assert your dominance over the bear. Teach your children to wave their arms and stomp their feet, and then walk slowly to the house if a bear is present.

Taking action to reinstall the bears' natural fear of humans is called "aversive conditioning."

By actively discouraging the bear, you become the alpha bear staking out your territory. Aversive

What are some basic aversive conditioning techniques? Start intense and vary your tactics to scare bears away.

- wave your arms;
- open an umbrella;
- stomp your feet;

Can humans and bears peacefully coexist?

"Yes!" says bear expert Lynn Rogers, Ph.D., of the North American Bear Center

Dr. Rogers is a wildlife biologist who has studied bears for 40 years. You may have seen him on the *Animal Planet* special, "The Man Who Walks with Bears." He is recognized around the world as the leading

expert in bear behavior. Dr. Rogers maintains that one of the safest places to be is in the woods with black bears.

Why? Because black bears are typically not aggressive toward humans. When threatened, their first instinct is to run away or climb a tree. The claws of black bears are strong for climbing trees, but not sharp for holding prey. They are omnivores who are primarily vegetarian.



Additionally, no one in the written history of New Jersey has ever been seriously injured by a black bear.

According to Dr. Rogers, you are...

- 48 times more likely to be killed by a spider
- 190 times more likely to be killed by a dog
- 380 times more likely to be killed by lightning
- 97,000 times more likely to be murdered by another human being

...than to be killed by a black bear.

So, if you see a bear, enjoy the experience!

"One of the safest places to be is in the woods with black bears."

—world renowned bear expert Lynn Rogers, Ph.D.

Unlike grizzlies, mother bears protect their cubs by sending them up the nearest tree. Dr. Rogers and his colleagues have routinely tagged black bear cubs in the presence of their mothers and no one has ever been seriously injured or killed.



Debunking common black bear myths

- **“Will black bears attack if they sense a person is afraid” myth.** Most people who encounter black bears close-up ARE afraid and are not attacked. The idea that bears will attack if they sense we are vulnerable is an idea conjured up out of fear. Now when a bear is afraid, they may clack their teeth together, moan, blow, huff, or stomp the ground. They may bluff charge (run toward you and then stop before reaching you). These are ways the bear is showing you he or she is uncomfortable with the situation and needs space. These are NOT indications of aggressive intent.
- **“Running away from bears will trigger an attack” myth.** “Never run” makes the top of many lists, but experience suggests otherwise. The common response is: “I saw a black bear. I ran one way, and he ran the other.” The problem is that once something is written, it gets repeated so many times it becomes fact in people’s minds—especially if it comes from a government agency.
- **“Getting Between a Mother and Cub” myth.** One of the first things a mother black bear teaches her young is to climb a tree when she is concerned about their safety. Often, the mother bear leaves the area until it is safe for them to come down. Be respectful of black bears and their offspring by keeping your distance.
- **“Posturing” myth.** When a black bear is standing upright on two legs, he is trying to get a better view or to see what’s up the tree. It’s not a threatening sign.
- **“Attack” myth.** Black bear attacks are extremely rare. From 1900 – 2010 (110 years), twenty-two people were killed by black bears in the United States. Not to minimize any tragedy, but this is an incredible safety record considering there are over 1 million encounters with bears each year in the United States. Conversely, while black bears do not pose a significant risk to the public, hunters do. According to the International Hunter Education Association, approximately 1,000 people in North America are shot by hunters every year, and just under a hundred are fatal. In New Jersey, from 1995 to 2005, five people were killed in hunting accidents. No one has ever been killed or seriously injured by a black bear. The often cited 1852 incident occurred in Arkansas, not in New Jersey.
- **“Ferocious bears” myth.** If you see a ferocious bear on the cover of a magazine, these are staged by bear actors. The media sensationalizes everything because fear sells.
- **“Man-Eating” myth.** Bears are omnivores, but their diet is primarily vegetarian. They feed on seasonal foods such as: skunk cabbage, foliage, berries/fruit, acorns, nuts, and seeds. During the spring and summer, they take in as many calories as possible in preparation for their hibernation. Since bears are also opportunistic feeders – at times – they also eat insects, fish, and carrion.

As people learn more about black bears, old fears are being replaced with respect and understanding.

Why is a black bear feeding ban law necessary?

The vast majority of bear incidents in New Jersey involve unsecured trash bins and dumpsters as well as bird feeders. Reducing the accessibility of human-generated foods (unsecured trash, bait, seeds) can be highly successful in separating black bears and humans. A meaningful law would help reduce bear-human conflicts. The DFW’s enforcement of the current law is poor to non-existent. Visit BearSmartNJ.org to learn more about the current law, upcoming legislation, and how you can help.

Case studies proved that when food was unavailable, bears were capable of living in close proximity to humans without conflict.

— Wildlife Conservation Society, 2008



A black bear foraging for natural food.

Are YOU a B.E.A.R. Member?

Please join or renew your membership TODAY! For a \$20 membership (\$10 for students and seniors), you will be supporting our efforts to keep New Jersey’s black bears safe.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

County: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____

- Enclosed is \$_____ for membership. I am already a proud member.
Please accept this additional donation.

Please make check payable to BEAR and send to us at:
BEAR Program, PO Box 613, Manalapan, NJ 07726 | Thank you for your support!

Bear Education And Resource is a program of Animal Protection League of New Jersey. APLNJ is a federally recognized 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and a New Jersey registered charity.

The BEAR Program was founded in 1992. Our primary mission is to protect black bears and their habitat. Our Bear Smart Community outreach program serves to educate residents about bears, reduce unwarranted fears and increase tolerance of our bear neighbors. Both our protection and education objectives foster a peaceful coexistence and replace fear with respect and understanding.