



SAFETY DIRECTOR BULLETIN



BLACK BEARS BEST PRACTICES

Black Bears are the largest land mammals in New Jersey, and their population has been increasing and expanding its range both southward and eastward. The highest populations are found in the northwest section of the state, but there are now confirmed Black Bear sightings in all 21 of New Jersey's counties.

Due to the increase in population, encounters with humans have become more frequent. Therefore, it is essential to be aware of your surroundings in areas frequented by Black Bears. It is important to take the necessary steps to minimize attracting Black Bears to the home and locations where they may become a nuisance.

This includes park areas, especially where a food source is available, such as garbage cans, dumpsters, and the residue from charcoal grills. Once Black Bears find an easily accessible and reliable food source, they will continue to return and may lose their natural fear of humans.

Garbage

Human garbage is attractive to Black Bears. Don't place garbage cans outside the night before pick-up. Black Bears can be quite active at night and will seek out an easy meal from a garbage can or dumpster. Keep cans in a garage or basement and place them at the curb in the morning before pick-up. Consider utilizing certified bear-proof dumpsters and garbage cans in public areas.

A good resource for bear-resistant refuse products can be found at the [Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee](#).

Other Food Sources

Black Bears are highly adaptable and can learn very quickly to associate people with food. Unsecured food sources of human origin, such as residential garbage, birdseed, dog food, beehives, domestic poultry, or fruit trees, have long been documented as sources of human-bear conflicts.

Black Bears have an incredible sense of smell and have been known to detect a food source up to two miles away. They are opportunistic and omnivorous feeders and are always looking for their next meal. They will commonly damage bird feeders while seeking some favorites, such as sunflower seeds and suet. If you choose to feed birds, do so during daylight hours only, between December 1 and April 1, when Black Bears are least active.

Suspend feeders from a free-hanging wire between trees. Black Bears are also excellent climbers, so make sure feeders are at least 10 feet off the ground and 10 feet away from the trunks.

Clean up after your pets, and don't feed them outdoors—store pet food in bear-resistant containers inside a secure area such as a basement or garage. Black Bears can break into or damage most sheds. Dogs that approach Black Bears may be injured or killed, so always walk dogs on a leash if you live in bear country.

Clean outdoor grills thoroughly after each use. Grease and food residue will attract Black Bears.

Black Bear Encounters

Seeing a Black Bear in the wild can be an exhilarating experience, but caution and safety should always be considered, as they are powerful wild animals. Generally, Black Bears tend to be wary of people but should be respected and avoided when possible. Predatory attacks on humans are rare, but Black Bears can be formidable and unpredictable, so you should never approach one. A female Black Bear with cubs can be especially protective of her young and is more likely to act aggressively towards any perceived threats.



Remain calm if you have an encounter and make the Black Bear aware of your presence by speaking in an assertive voice, clapping your hands, or making other noises. Make yourself look as big as possible by waving your arms, and usually, the Black Bear will leave the area.

Black Bears will sometimes stand on their hind legs and be as tall as 7 feet. As imposing as this may be, it's usually not aggressive behavior. They are nearsighted and will often stand to get a better view.

However, they will occasionally "bluff charge" when they feel threatened. If this happens, stand your ground, avoid direct eye contact, then slowly back away and do not run. Try to make sure that the Black Bear has an escape route. They may also aggressively posture when agitated, pop their jaws, and swat the ground. Remember, Black Bears can run up to 35 miles per hour, the average weight of an adult male is 400 pounds, and the largest recorded Black Bear in NJ was 829 pounds. If a Black Bear does attack, fight back!

Please view this [Black Bear Safety Tips video](#) from the NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife.

Never Intentionally Feed Black Bears

It is illegal in New Jersey, and it is dangerous. People who feed Black Bears often think they are helping them when they are hurting them. Food-conditioned Black Bears can rapidly lose their fear of humans, resulting in Black Bears approaching people and ultimately putting the lives of both humans and Black Bears at risk. Anyone feeding Black Bears could face a penalty of up to \$1,000 for each offense.

Law Enforcement should consider attending the ["Law Enforcement Handling of Black Bear Complaints"](#) course that is periodically given by the NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife-Conservation Police. This full-day course includes classroom instruction as well as hands-on field exercises. Law Enforcement Leaders may also wish to consider including the issue of bears in their animal control policies and procedures, as well as their training programs addressing animal issues. Many agencies' animal control policies and procedures may focus solely on cats and dogs, but as the frequency of Black Bear encounters becomes more common, specific agency guidance may be essential to keeping officers and community members safe, as well as protecting the agency's reputation.

Be sure to report Black Bear damage or nuisance behavior to your local police department or the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Division of Fish and Wildlife at (877) 927-6337.

Please go to the [NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife's Black Bear Facts Page](#) for more information.