

# LIVING WITH BEARS IN WISCONSIN



Black bears are commonly found in the northern third of Wisconsin, but are being sighted more frequently in the central and southern counties of Wisconsin as they expand their range. As the black bear population continues to grow, so do an increasing number of bear-human conflicts. In order for bears to coexist with humans, we have to understand normal bear behavior. Black bears tend to be shy, solitary animals, but at some times of the year, particularly in the spring when bears emerge from their winter dens and food is not abundant, bears may be on the lookout for opportunistic food sources. This might be your garbage can, or the bird feeder in your back yard. Nearly all human-bear conflicts are a result of the animals' search for food. There are lots of simple things you can do to avoid conflicts with bears. With your help we can continue to live

together with this great animal, enjoying their presence in the woods around us and at the same time reducing conflicts with bears around our homes and our campsites.

## REDUCING BEAR CONFLICTS NEAR YOUR HOME:

Black bears are attracted to numerous items around homes, including: bird feeders, compost piles, grills, pet food, gardens, and garbage. Here are some simple recommendations to avoid problem bears:

### **Bird Feeders**

- Make bird feeders inaccessible to bears by hanging them at least 10 feet off the ground, and 5 feet away from tree trunks, or on a limb that will not support a bear (you can still refill the feeder easily by using a pulley system).
- Consider taking bird feeders down at the end of winter (mid-April) when bears emerge from their winter dens.
- During spring and summer, bring feeders inside at night, a time when bears frequent stations.
- Clean up spilled bird seed below feeder stations.
- If you see a bear at a bird feeder during the day, take the feeder down and discontinue all feeding for at least two weeks.

### **Garbage Cans**

- Keep your garbage cans tightly closed, and indoors if possible.
- Pick up loose or spilled garbage so that it doesn't attract bears.
- Occasionally clean out your garbage cans with ammonia to make them less attractive to bears.

### **And a few more...**

- NEVER FEED A BEAR! Intentional feeding will create a bear that is habituated to humans, and may become a possible nuisance to you and other people in the area. The bear will not forget the feeding experience, and will tend to get more demanding with time.
- Bring in pet food at night.
- Clean up and put away outdoor grills after you are done using them for the day.

## WHEN YOU ARE CAMPING:

- Don't cook, eat, or store food in your tent! The smell of food may attract bears.
- Store food and cooking utensils away from your campsite, preferably in a vehicle or hung in a tree at least 10 feet off the ground and 5 feet out on a limb that will not support a bear.
- Dispose of scraps in closed containers away from your campsite, *not* in the fire.
- Keep your campsite clean.

## IF A BEAR IS CAUSING A NUISANCE IN YOUR AREA:

Contact the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Wildlife Services. In the northern half of Wisconsin, call 1-800-228-1368, or in the southern half of Wisconsin call 1-800-433-0663. They can help you by providing additional information on reducing or eliminating your specific problem. If the situation is severe and presents a threat to health and human safety, they can also remove the bear from the area.

## BLACK BEARS AND AGRICULTURAL DAMAGE:

With a healthy black bear population, it is inevitable that black bears may damage agricultural crops in some areas. Particularly tasty treats are apiaries (beehives) and corn fields in the milk stage. Bears also occasionally attack livestock. The Wildlife Damage Abatement & Claims Program (WDACP) is available to help Wisconsin farmers whose crops or livestock are damaged by bears. If you would like more information on this program, please contact the Wildlife Damage Specialist at (608) 266-8204 or write us at WI DNR, 101 S. Webster St. (WM/6), P.O. Box 7921, Madison WI 53707-7921. You can also check out the WDACP website at: <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/damage/>.

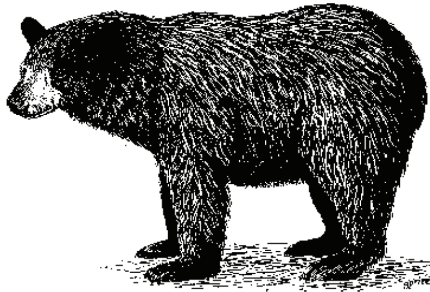
# Facts about Wisconsin's Black Bear

**Weight:** Males, 250-300 lbs; females, 120-280 lbs.

**Body Characteristics:** Bears appear bulky and are glossy black, with a tan patch across the nose. Brown and cinnamon colored bears appear less often.

**Reproduction:** Black bears are sexually mature at 3 years of age. Females will breed every other year from then on. Mating takes place from June to early July. During the 225-day gestation period, the fertilized egg experiences delayed implantation until late November or early December. Females then give birth to two to three cubs in January or early February while they are still in their winter sleep!

**Cubs:** At birth, the bear cubs weigh 7-12 oz. Their eyes are closed and fur is sparse. Growth takes place quickly. Cubs will first venture into the world with their mother in late March. They remain with their mother through the summer and usually den with her the following winter. In the springtime, the mother will chase off the cubs so she can breed again.



**Diet:** Bears are omnivorous, meaning they will eat almost anything! Their diet generally consists of vegetation, insects, berries, and nuts. Occasionally they eat carrion and small animals. They also target livestock, beehives, garbage, and agricultural crops.

**Habitat:** Large forested areas with swamps and stream bottoms, and areas with minimal development are good habitat for black bears. They are also found around thick ground vegetation with lots of trees and bushes that produce nuts and berries. Fallen trees provide bears with locations to dig a winter den.

**Behavior:** Bears are typically shy and secretive animals; most go to great lengths to avoid humans. Bears typically wander over long distances. Home ranges are about 27 square miles for males, and about 8 square miles for females. Black bears are most active around dusk, but may be out and about any time of the day or night. Mid-May to late September is the period of most activity.

**Winter Sleep:** Bears are not true hibernators! During the winter months bears "den up" where they will fall into a deep sleep. During this time bears live off the body fat they have accumulated during the fall. Their body temperature, heartbeat, and respiration decrease, but not to the level where hibernation occurs. Dormant bears can be easily awakened from their winter sleep!

## IF YOU SEE A BLACK BEAR:

- Make noise and wave your arms—let the bear know you are there so you don't surprise it. Bears normally leave an area once they know a human is around.
- If you happen to surprise a bear at close range, back away slowly.
- If you are near a vehicle or building, go inside until the bear wanders away.
- Do not approach a bear. Respect black bears as wild animals and enjoy them safely—from a distance.



## WEBSITES WITH ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- *Wisconsin DNR* bear management and hunting website:  
<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/hunt/bear/>
- *Michigan DNR*—Preventing Bear Problems in Michigan:  
[http://www.michigan.gov/documents/preventing\\_bear\\_problems\\_in\\_MI\\_111110\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/preventing_bear_problems_in_MI_111110_7.pdf)
- *Alberta Bear Smart*:  
<http://srd.alberta.ca/RecreationPublicUse/AlbertaBearSmart/Default.aspx>