

living in

BLACK BEAR COUNTRY

**A Guide for
Preventing
Problems
with Bears in
North Carolina**

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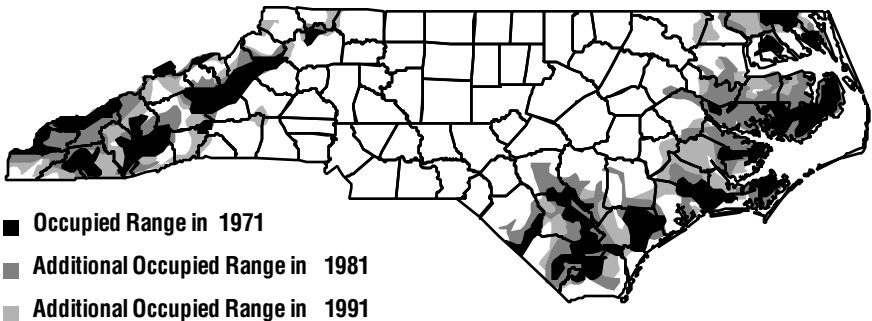
The black bear is the largest wild mammal in North Carolina. This powerful animal can be found in increasing numbers where the state's forests grow thick with food and cover. Whether meandering up steep slopes, climbing trees at incredible speeds or swimming rivers and lakes, the black bear is one of the state's most awe-some animals — for those lucky enough to catch a glimpse of these shy creatures.

Black bears once thrived throughout the state, but excessive logging, the chestnut blight, and unregulated hunting nearly eliminated the population. Beginning in the 1930s, hunters and other conservationists pushed for bear hunting regulations and for the creation of the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. In the 1960s, biologists began scientific management of bears by collecting data. And in the 1970s, thousands of acres of bear sanctuaries were set aside to protect female bears, and more aggressive

enforcement of regulations began. These efforts, along with a growing admiration of bears and the maturing of the forests, led to large increases in bears across the state. About 8,500 black bears live in North Carolina, and occupy more than 9 million acres, mainly in the mountains and along the coast.

The human population is growing too, with about 7 million people calling North Carolina home. Each year, more people move into or visit black bear country. Sighting one of these glossy black animals, some of which weigh more than 600 pounds, is an electrifying experience. But having a bear raid your garbage is a nuisance. Humans and bears can live in the same territory if people take steps to keep bears wild and prevent them from becoming a problem.

DIAGRAM 1: Black Bear Range Map





The black bear, which can weigh 600 pounds, is the largest wild animal found in North Carolina.



DESCRIPTION

Black bears are large-bodied animals with square heads, powerful limbs, round, erect ears and a short tail. Their soft, glossy coat is black, except for a long, brown muzzle and, sometimes, a white chest patch. Bears have a powerful, barrel-shaped body. They shuffle with a flat-footed gait, an elbow sticking out, looking pigeon-toed and bow-legged. However, they can run up to 30 miles per hour for short distances, climb easily and swim well. Bears are extremely agile for their size, sometimes standing erect to smell or see better. Bears communicate with various facial and body expressions. They also whine, snort, roar, bawl and snap their teeth. They are near-sighted, but have a keen sense of smell. Bears vary in size, with adult males (boars) generally being

larger, from 5 to 6 feet long, three feet at the shoulder, and 300 to 600 pounds. Females (sows) are generally 4 to 5 feet long, 2½ feet high and 150 to 200 pounds. Bears have five clawed toes on each foot and teeth that enable them to eat almost anything, from ants to zinnias.

THE LIFE OF A BLACK BEAR

In North Carolina, female black bears as young as 3 years old can produce their first litter of cubs, and every other year after that. Mating occurs from June through August, but development of embryos does not begin until November or December. One to five cubs are born

BLACK BEAR FACTS

MYTH

Black bears only live in the mountains.

FACT

Bears live in 30 coastal counties as well as 25 mountain counties in North Carolina.

MYTH

Black bears are dangerous to humans.

FACT

Black bears are usually non-aggressive, shy creatures. They avoid humans unless provoked or attracted by human activities. Unprovoked black bear attacks are extremely rare.

MYTH

It's OK to feed black bears.

FACT

Feeding bears can cause them to lose their fear of humans and become pests. Problem bears may eventually have to be destroyed.

MYTH

Bears that act tame are safe.

FACT

Wild bears avoid humans. A tame bear has likely lost its fear of humans and is much more dangerous than a wild bear.

MYTH

Bears cannot remember where they find food.

FACT

Bears remember food sources for years, and probably will return there. If bears find food in one of your storage areas, move it to a more secure location.

December through February while the females are denning. Newborns, which weigh from 6 to 12 ounces at birth, have pink skin covered with fine, dark hair. Cubs are helpless at birth, and remain in the den, nursing. After one month, their eyes open, and at two months, they begin to walk. They leave the den in three months, and are weaned by seven months. Bears traveling in groups in the fall are usually females with cubs. Playful cubs splash in water and wrestle with their litter mates. Young bears stay near their mother for protection for about 16 months, and will den with her for their second winter. The family disbands the following summer when the female is ready to breed again.

When bears emerge from their winter sleep in March or April, they are very hungry. They will feed on almost anything including garbage, bird seed in feeders, grease on a backyard grill, or pet food. Do not feed them or allow them to eat garbage or anything other than wild foods. Bears are most likely to look for human food May through early July because wild foods are less plentiful.

Bears prefer berries, nuts, insects, carrion and roots. When wild food is scarce, or when bears are traveling to new territory, they may visit populated areas in search of food. Keeping human food away from bears helps them settle in natural areas, instead of becoming pests that may ultimately need to be destroyed.

In May and June, 1-year-old bears leave

their mothers. The yearlings may wander through populated areas in search of new habitat. They pose no danger to humans, unless provoked or tamed by feeding. Keep all forms of human and pet food away from them, or they will not disperse naturally.

Bears prefer mature forests or areas with thick cover and plenty of berries and nuts, but some North Carolina bears live near developed areas, if people tolerate them. Each adult bear establishes a home range, which is not an exclusive territory but rather a familiar area where the bear spends most of its time. Although ranges overlap, bears usually avoid direct contact with each other. Bears usually travel and feed by day, and are most active at dawn and dusk. They are active at night if covering long distances or looking for food in areas frequented by humans.

After the family unit breaks up, each yearling female establishes a home range near its mother's home range. Males disperse, moving up to 60 miles from their rearing home range, to establish new territories.

June through August is breeding season for bears. Males wander long distances pursuing mates, and young males avoid older males. Wandering bears do not remain in settled areas unless people allow them to eat human food.

During late summer and early fall, bears feed nearly constantly to fatten up for the winter. They prefer acorns, other nuts and fruits, but will visit fields of corn, peanuts and other crops.

In North Carolina, black bears den in

November or December. Dens can be hollow trees, rock crevices or piles of leaves on the ground. Denning bears fall in and out of a deep sleep, but they can be roused quickly. A bear's body temperature drops about 10 degrees, and breathing and heart rate decline. Bears recycle their bodily wastes into protein during denning, but they lose fat weight steadily over the winter. On warm, late-winter days, bears may emerge to look for food. They leave the den for the new year in March or April.

IF YOU SEE A BEAR . . .

Try to stay calm. Bears live in many North Carolina counties, and they are not usually dangerous unless humans feed or provoke them. Enjoy this rare chance from a distance. The bear in your backyard may be dispersing through your neighborhood or searching for a mate. It will not stay in a settled area unless it finds food. Keep children nearby. Keep pets locked up. Don't approach a bear. If it changes its natural behavior (feeding, foraging or movement) because of your presence, you are too close. Never surround or corner a bear. If you happen to meet a bear at close range, back away slowly and make lots of noise.

Never feed bears or any wild animals, even if they look hungry or tame. Feeding bears teaches them to seek out human food and garbage. Bears that get used to human foods are much more dangerous

Humans are only asking for trouble when they feed bears. Bears that are used to being fed are much more dangerous than wild bears.



than wild bears, and sometimes have to be killed. If a bear seems tame, stay well away, and warn others of the danger.

Take extra precautions not to feed bears accidentally — bears are attracted to garbage, food scraps, pet food and many other forms of human food. Keep such foods locked away from bears in strong, safe places.

LIVING WITH BEARS

The following techniques are designed to make living in bear country, well, bear-able. The recommendations are not fool-proof, and you should use common sense in deciding which ones may work for you. **BE CAREFUL** — bears are wild animals, and it is impossible to predict how they may respond in all situations.

AGRICULTURE

In eastern North Carolina, farmers are bears' best friends, especially during late summer and early fall. The feeling is not always mutual. Here's how to encourage bears to stay in the woods and leave your crops alone.

BEE HIVES

If bears have not yet damaged hives:

- Don't place hives in abandoned or wooded, overgrown areas.
- Don't try to control bears by putting out food in other areas of your property; this just attracts and conditions bears to humans.
- Early in spring, before bears are active, surround hives with an electric fence. Use either temporary fencing (electric net or polypropylene electric tape)

or permanent electrified wire with low impedance and high voltage (5000 volts). Put up warning signs or take other steps to keep people away from the fence.

- String barbed wire and lay sheet metal on the ground around the fence.

If bears have damaged hives:

- Erect a permanent electric fence. You may want to try baiting it with sardines, peanut butter or other food on the top and bottom strands.
- Tie bear hounds up near the hives.
- Put the hives on a platform surrounded by electric fencing.

CROPS

If bears have not yet damaged crops:

- Locate crops to reduce chances of bears visiting. For example, surround a peanut crop with cotton, and plant crops well away from wooded areas.
- Alternate other row crops with corn to provide less cover and food.
- Don't try to control bears by putting out food in other areas of your property; this just attracts bears.
- Allow legal bear hunting during the bear season.

If bears have damaged crops:

- String single-strand, baited, polytape-electric or other suitable fencing along the most exposed side or area of fields, or around small fields.
- Scare bears with automatic gas cannons, streamers, balloons, fireworks,

flashing lights, or radios left on all night. Start with simple materials already on hand.

- Chase bears doing damage with bear hounds. Before using hounds, make sure it's legal in your area and legal during the time that the bear is doing damage. If the damaged crops are near highways or homes, chasing bears may not be a good solution.
- Allow legal bear hunting.

LIVESTOCK, FISH FARMS

If bears have not yet harmed livestock:

- Store feed in sturdy buildings with secure doors.
- Avoid pasturing animals in remote or heavily wooded areas.
- Quickly dispose of carcasses of dead animals and fish in accordance with regulations.
- Don't try to control bears by putting out food in other areas of your property; this just attracts and conditions bears to humans.
- Pen animals near or in a barn at night, especially expectant females. Clear areas of all signs of birthing.

If bears have harmed livestock:

- Erect electric fencing.
- Use trained bear dogs or guard dogs.

Other options for the landowner

- If bears continue to destroy crops or other property, you may be able to lease your land to bear hunters to recover some of your losses and to help keep the bear population

The best way to keep bears out of your campsite is to store food and garbage far away from sleeping areas.



at a reasonable level. Direct bear hunters to problem bears during hunting season. North Carolina General Statute 113-274 (c)(1)(a) allows landowners to kill bears in the act of destroying or damaging the landowners' property. The bear must be in the act of destroying property, and the kill must be reported to a local wildlife enforcement officer within 24 hours.

CAMPING & HIKING

Nothing ruins a good night's sleep like having a hungry bear rummaging through your supplies. Here's how to discourage bears from visiting your campsite for a midnight snack.

Grills

- Clean your campsite after each meal, and scrub grills thoroughly after use. Dispose of aluminum foil and scraps in metal containers with locking lids. Don't cook or store food in or near your tent.

Supplies

- At night, store foodstuffs, eating utensils, scented supplies (toothpaste, shampoo) away from bears (Diagram 2). Bears can break into car trunks.

Garbage & Scraps

- Remove all garbage from your campsite at least once a day, especially right after each evening meal. Take garbage to a main garbage container, if available. Carry out everything you carry in, unless you can dispose of it in a bear-proof container. Don't toss or bury cooking grease or other food scraps; pack them out. Don't overload garbage containers, and don't store food or garbage in tents.

If a bear comes into camp...

- Try to scare the bear away by banging on pots or yelling. The more people making noise the better.

DRIVING IN BEAR COUNTRY

Several bears are killed each year on North Carolina roads, mostly at night. When driving at night in bear country, slow down and use high beams. Keep alert for movement on the sides of the road. If you see

DIAGRAM 2: Storing Food at Camp



a bear, flash your high beams, sound your horn and slow down or stop. If you hit a bear, don't get out of the car. Drive to a telephone and call the highway patrol or local law enforcement officers.

HOMES & CABINS

North Carolina bears sometimes wander by remote homes and cabins. You may be thrilled to catch a glimpse of a bear, but you don't want it to frequent the area. Here's how to keep bears at a distance.

Grills

- Clean thoroughly and store in secure area.

Garbage & Scraps

- Store garbage in strong, secure buildings or metal, locking containers until pickup. Fence or secure compost, and stop adding compost for three or four weeks if a bear visits. Freeze meat scraps in plastic bags until pickup. Sprinkle lime or ammonia on garbage to reduce odor.

DO NOT LEAVE GARBAGE OUT OVERNIGHT!

Pets

- Store all edibles, such as pet food, in airtight containers in a secure area (such as a basement). Feed pets indoors, providing only enough so that all food is eaten.

DO NOT LEAVE PET FOODS OUT OVERNIGHT!

Bird feeders

- If bears visit your feeders, remove feed-

Bird feeders should be removed as soon as bears begin visiting an area.



ers for three or four weeks. If bears are persistent problems in the area, remove feeders, including hummingbird feeders from April 1 through November 1.

Feeding other animals

- Do not feed other wildlife. Feeding wildlife can spread disease and attract bears, especially from April 1 through November 1.

Gardens & Orchards

- Electric fences or bear hounds will protect small plots. Pick corn quickly, especially if visited

by bears. Refer to agriculture section for ideas on protecting larger plots.

LANDFILLS & GARBAGE

It's funny when cartoon bears raid the garbage, but real bears allowed to feed on garbage can become real problems. Here's how you can help put trash (and bears) in their proper places.

Municipal landfills

- Cover garbage completely by the

DIAGRAM 3: Secured Container

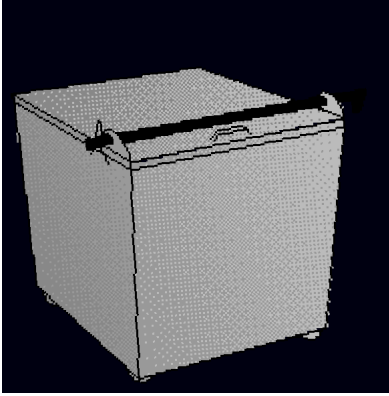
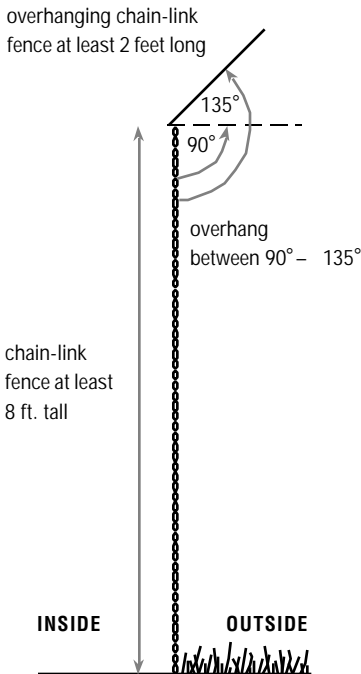


DIAGRAM 4: Black Bear Fencing



end of each day. Fence and secure landfills. Trim trees near fences. Keep the bears out!

Garbage containers

- Cover garbage containers with heavy metal lids that can be locked (Diagram 3). Empty containers often enough to prevent overflow. Fence the area if possible, using an overhang that projects outward (Diagram 4). Keep nearby trees trimmed. Watch for uneven ground and doorways as potential entry points. Consider adding electric wire or burying fencing 6-12 inches along the bottom edge, to improve the effectiveness of the fence. Areas with tourists or other visitors should provide bear-proof containers and instructions for guests who must put out garbage long before pick-up.

Garbage services

- Provide customers with instructions on bear-proofing their garbage cans. Give them a pick-up schedule, and ask them not to leave garbage out until pick-up day.

DO NOT LEAVE GARBAGE OUT OVERNIGHT!

LAW ENFORCEMENT

When a 400-pound bear wandered onto Topsail Beach in southeastern North Carolina several years ago, law enforcement officials spent 18 hours calming people and keeping the media away until the bear left the area. Here's what to do when your "bear calls" come in.

Bears in town

- Try to keep people calm. A bear in town is not necessarily a problem as long as the animal has a clear escape route to woods or other cover and is not feeding on human food. The bear may be dispersing to new habitat and only passing through. Keep people and animals away. Do not corner, surround or approach the bear.

Treed bear

- Move people far away and wait until night falls. Make sure the bear has a clear escape route to woods or other cover.

Injured bear

- Keep people and animals well away from the bear. Do not attempt to move the bear. Call your local wildlife enforcement officer or biologist.

RESTAURANTS

Bears usually prefer take-out from garbage containers or grease barrels, but they will dine in if garbage and supplies are not stored in strong, secure locations. Here's how to keep bears on a diet of wild foods:

Cooking oil

- Dispose of waste oil indoors or in heavy, metal, locking containers.

Food scraps, garbage

- Place in containers with heavy metal lids that can be locked until pick-up.
(See **HOMES & CABINS** and **LANDFILLS & GARBAGE**)



FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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TO REPORT WILDLIFE VIOLATIONS, CALL: 1-800-662-7137