

News from the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department

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DO YOUR PART TO PREVENT BEAR VISITS THIS SPRING

CONCORD, N.H. -- Do not be “fooled” by the Northeaster that has blanketed New Hampshire with several inches of snow -- bears are emerging from their winter dens and will become more active over the next few weeks. Bears den primarily to avoid being active during a period of time when food sources are limited. Weather conditions do play a role in denning phenology, but the influence of weather on denning behavior is less significant than food availability. As a result, do not expect that this spring snowstorm will reduce bear activity around the state. Bears are ready to come out of winter dens, and it is time for people to be vigilant and remove attractants that draw bears into residential areas.

Homeowners need to take action now to reduce the chance of having a bear visit their home. One important guideline is to take down bird feeders and keep them down between April and December, says New Hampshire Fish and Game Bear Project Leader Andrew Timmins; bears are attracted to birdseed, which is a nutrient-rich, easily accessible food source. “By late March, many New Hampshire residents had reported seeing bears, or bear tracks, around their bird feeders,” Timmins said. “Bears remember areas where they successfully secured food on previous occasions. It is how they adapt to periods of low food abundance. Given that sunflower seed is more nutritious than most foods a bear will find in the woods, it is easy to understand why some residences get visited by bears every spring.”

Securing garbage is equally important as removing birdfeeders. If you secure your garbage and remove birdfeeders, you have addressed the two attractants that cause the vast majority of bear/human conflicts in New Hampshire. Removing these two common attractants will go a long way towards reducing the number of annual bear complaints. The N.H. Fish and Game Department thanks you for your efforts.

Spring is a critical time for bears, as the greatest nutritional stress on a bear occurs during the first two months after they emerge from dens. During the denning period, bears typically lose 25% of their body weight, and a lactating female with newborn cubs may lose as much as 40%. The New Hampshire black bear population remains stable, with a statewide population that approximates 4,800 bears.

Homeowners should take action to reduce the chances of a bear visiting their home. Avoid encounters with bears by taking a few simple precautions:

- * Stop all bird feeding by April 1.
- * Clean up any spilled birdseed and dispose of it in the trash.
- * Secure all garbage in airtight containers inside a garage or adequate storage area, and put garbage out on the morning of pickup, not the night before.
- * Avoid putting meat or other food scraps in your compost pile.
- * Don't leave pet food dishes outside overnight.
- * Clean and store outdoor grills after each use.
- * Finally, never intentionally feed bears!

These steps will help to ensure that your backyard does not become attractive to bears and other wildlife, which is important because it prevents property damage by bears and because it keeps bears from becoming nuisance animals.

“The surest way to prevent bear/human conflicts is to keep your yard free of attractants. You may need to take additional steps to protect items that can’t be removed. For example, dumpsters should have a locking metal top that prevents access by bears, and beehives and livestock should be protected with an electric fence. To avoid bear-related conflicts, prevent bears from visiting and, most of all, from getting in the habit of finding food on your property,” said Timmins.

For more information on preventing conflicts with black bears, visit http://www.wildnh.com/Wildlife/Somethings_Bruin.htm.

If you have questions about bear-related problems, you can get advice by calling a toll-free number coordinated jointly by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Wildlife Services and the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department: 1-888-749-2327 (1-888-SHY-BEAR).

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