

WisDNR: Be Bear Aware: Encounters Increase During Summer

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MADISON, Wis. – Following several recent black bear sightings across the state, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources is reminding the public to take precautions to avoid potential conflicts this summer.

Although black bears are most common in the northern half of the state, populations have been slowly expanding south over the last decade. Wisconsinites are encouraged to take the same bear precautions no matter what part of the state.

While bear sightings in southern Wisconsin remain rare, the sightings in Waukesha and Washington Counties this summer are a reminder that bears can be found in any county.

Sightings usually increase in early summer when young bears strike out on their own for the first time. Bear breeding season also occurs in early summer resulting in many male bears wandering around in search of a mate.

If a bear is near your home or cabin:

- From a safe location, wave your arms and make noise to scare it away.
- Back away slowly and seek a safe location where you can wait for the bear to leave.
- When scaring a bear away, make sure it has a clear escape route; never corner a bear.
- If you encounter a bear while in the woods, DO NOT RUN, stay calm and do not approach the bear.
- Never approach any bear.
- For your safety, do not attempt to break up a fight between your pet and a

bear.

Black bears are naturally cautious animals that normally avoid contact with people for their safety, but conflicts between people and bears can arise. Additionally, bears can quickly learn to associate humans with food when food sources are available.

If a bear finds food, such as bird feed or garbage near your home or cabin, it will likely return for more. Bear visits are more likely to stop when food is no longer available. Bears will periodically check sites where food was once available, so it may take several days to weeks after a food source has been removed for a bear to completely discontinue visiting food sites.

It is important to make sure these tasty food sources are hidden from bears at all times of the year, but it's especially important in warmer months when bears are more active.

Follow these steps to avoid attracting black bears:

- Do not knowingly feed a bear.
- Completely remove bird feeders, even during daytime hours – Bears are active during the day and may cause problems even if the feeders are out only during that time.
- Clean areas where bird feeders were located so that accumulated deposits of spilled seed are removed.
- Reduce garbage odors by rinsing food cans before putting them in covered recycling containers or garbage cans.
- Keep meat scraps in the freezer until garbage day, and if possible, keep garbage cans in a closed building until the morning of pick-up.
- Be sure to lock commercial dumpsters.
- Keep pet food inside or inaccessible to bears even during daytime hours.
- Keep grills and picnic tables clean.

Bears are normally solitary forest animals, but their powerful sense of smell can lead them into urban areas in search of food. Black bears are secretive animals and usually try to avoid people. However, conflicts with humans can occur when bears destroy gardens, bird feeders, apiaries and trash cans.

By understanding bear behavior, there are several ways people can reduce

negative human-bear conflicts around their homes. The DNR's [Living With Black Bears In Wisconsin pamphlet](#) is a great resource for learning more about co-existing with bears in Wisconsin.

The department partners with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services Program to respond to approximately 800 bear-related complaints reported in Wisconsin each year.

If unable to resolve a conflict with a bear, contact the USDA Wildlife Services toll-free line at 1-800-433-0663 for properties in Southern Wisconsin and 1-800-228-1368 for properties in Northern Wisconsin. Most complaints are resolved through technical advice.

More information regarding bears and safety is available on [the DNR's Bear Hunting webpage](#).