

*COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA*  
*PENNSYLVANIA GAME COMMISSION*  
*NORTHAMPTON COUNTY*

Tel: 610-926-3136 Fax: 610-926-8835

Police Departments  
Northampton County 911 Operations Center,

It's that time of year when we (PGC and Northampton County 911) receive a flood of calls, complaints and sightings concerning the highly visible and often misunderstood black bears that are roaming through our local municipalities. Hopefully the enclosed information and attached PGC News Release will address some of the questions and concerns for you, local residents and responding police.

Over the past sixteen - eighteen years, Northampton County has experienced a steady increase in bear numbers just like most of the commonwealth. When a concerned, scared, or very upset individual calls the Pennsylvania Game Commission dispatch center with a bear complaint, the first advice given is generally self-help information. Bears love to eat, so remove the food source. Bird feeders should be taken down and garbage secured until garbage pickup day. These suggestions are not always well received, but they are effective. If the bear doesn't find or get enough to eat at one location, it will keep moving to seek out new food sources. Bears will not frequent or stay in an area if they cannot get enough to eat!

Most of the wayward bears at this time of year (May-June-July) are what we call yearlings (16-17 months old). They have just been booted out by the mother black bear or sow. She will deliberately chase her yearlings off and leave them on their own for the first time as she prepares to enter her breeding cycle (every two years). Pennsylvania's black bear breeding season runs from mid-June through mid-July. The breeding or mating season also contributes to the dispersal of young male black bears seeking out their own territories away from the much larger dominant males.

Generally speaking, when the PGC is called with a bear complaint that involves bird feeders, garbage cans or personal property damage, we give the caller self-help information first. When bears damage property, bee hives, livestock or poultry,

it is the responsibility game officers to investigate and determine if the offending bear needs to be trapped and relocated and if a bear damage claim is warranted.

So far this spring, my deputies and I have trapped/relocated several bears, picked up bears killed on the highways and immobilized and relocated a few black bears from highly populated areas or developments. Contrary to popular belief, trapping and relocating bears is not always the answer or best course of action. Often bears (mature adults) will return to same area over time and sometimes other bears will "fill the void" created by removing an existing bear. Northampton County definitely has well established bear runs where you can expect to see bears annually.

Every bear that we trap or tranquilize for relocation is processed by PGC officers. Bear processing means, weighing the bear, determining gender, tagging both ears, pulling a tooth for aging and general inspection for overall health and condition. Also, management unit codes, location code numbers and other information are collected to complete several bear capture forms which are downloaded into our PGC data base. All road-killed or illegally killed bears are processed in the same manner.

If your department receives numerous calls about a black bear in the area, please feel free to forward any of the attached information to the callers. Chasing a black bear through developed residential areas for hours on end usually isn't the best course of action. A chased bear's metabolism and adrenaline levels change significantly, causing the mix of immobilizing drugs we use to become much less effective. A better scenario would be to track the bear's location through sightings and phone calls. If the bear becomes "treed" (climbs tree to seek safety and refuge) either by a neighborhood dog, or naturally, the situation is now more controllable. Most often a treed bear can be kept that way for an indefinite amount of time. On one occasion we intentionally kept a bear treed for eleven hours to insure proper drug administration and recovery. Keeping the general public sensible and at a reasonable distance from black bear roaming the area is more of a challenge than the black bear. In reality it's a people problem more so than a bear problem.

Feeding bears in Pennsylvania has been illegal for many years. You cannot intentionally or unintentionally feed black bears at anytime of the year. Feeding bears will ultimately cause problems for someone!

Pennsylvania has never recorded a fatality caused by a black bear. Each year, we do investigate bear encounters where someone has been swatted, chased or bitten by a black bear. Most often these encounters or incidents involve a sow protecting her cubs, accidental close range or competition for food sources.

Black Bears are an incredible animal and a treasured wildlife resource of the commonwealth. They are not aggressive by nature and choose to avoid human contact when given the chance.

If you have any questions or concerns about bears in your respective areas, please contact me through our PGC dispatch center (610-926-3136) and I will return to call.

"Common sense and good judgment goes a long way when dealing with black bears".

Sincerely,


Brad Kreider, Northampton County 6-48-1  
Shawna Burkett, Northampton County 6-39-2

Wildlife Conservation Officers  
Pennsylvania Game Commission  
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

# Living with Pennsylvania Black Bears



## Living with Pennsylvania Black Bears

 **BLACK BEARS** have been roaming our forests, wallowing in our bogs and swamps, and living around our farms since the days before the earliest human settlements. Today, bears are many things to many people, from valued game animals to the highlight of an outdoor experience, to farm pillagers and neighborhood pests, to even a dangerous threat. Our perceptions of bears are a product of their mostly shy, mysterious nature and powerful presence, not to mention the timeless tales that have been told about them. Unfortunately, there's as much misinformation about bears in circulation as there is fact. And that's too bad, because bears needn't be feared, nor should they be dismissed as harmless. They simply need to be respected.

Pennsylvania's bear population has been increasing for decades, and at the same time, many people have moved into the areas where bears reside. As a result, bears and people are coming into contact more than ever. And most of these encounters occur when bears learn that where people live there's easy-to-obtain food. Learning about bears and being aware of their habits is important for people who live in bear country, which now includes most of the state.

### The bear facts

*Ursus americanus* is the black bear's scientific name; it means "American bear." Although three species of bears inhabit North America, only the black bear is found in Pennsylvania. Population estimates in recent years have ranged up around 15,000. Black bears appear heavy, but they are surprisingly agile; they can run up to 35 mph, climb trees and swim well. They may live up to 25 years in the wild.

Black bears are intelligent and curious. Studies show that bears can see colors, recognize human forms, and notice even the slightest movement. However, bears usually rely on their acute sense of smell and, to a lesser degree, hearing to locate food and warn them of danger.

Despite their common name, black bears are not always black. They may be cinnamon or, even more rare, blond. Many bears have a white blaze or "V" on their chest.

Adults usually weigh around 200 pounds, with males being heavier than females, often more than twice as much. Some weigh up to 600 or more pounds and rare individuals up to 900 have been found. Males are called boars; females, sows. Black bears measure about three feet high when on all fours or about five to seven feet tall when standing upright.

### Bear signs and sounds

Black bear tracks are distinctive. The hind footprint resembles a human's. Bears have five toes. The front foot is shorter than the rear, which is long and narrow. Claw marks may or may not be visible.



Bears use trails, just like people do. Look for tracks in soft earth or around mud puddles, and for claw marks on smooth-bark trees or rotten logs that have been ripped apart for insects. It's also easy to recognize a black bear's sizeable droppings of partly digested berries, corn or animal hair.

Adult black bears make a variety of sounds that include woofing, growls and jaw-popping. Sow's communicate with their cubs by using low grunts or huffs. Cubs whimper, chuckle and bawl.



### Feeding habits

Bears may be on the move at any time, but they're usually most active at dusk and dawn. Bears are omnivorous, eating almost anything, from berries, corn, acorns, beechnuts and even grass, to table scraps, carrion, honey and insects. During late summer and fall, black bears fatten up for winter hibernation. At this time they may actively feed for up to 20 hours a day, ingesting up to 20,000 calories.



### Bears and winter

Bears are usually dormant in winter, remaining in their dens, which can be rock caverns, excavated holes beneath shrubs, trees or dead falls, in hollow trees or brushy thickets. A hibernating bear's heart rate and breathing slow, and its body temperature drops slightly. During this time they do not eat or pass body wastes. A hibernating bear relies on stored fat to make it through the winter, however, they may emerge if they're disturbed.



### Mating and breeding

In Pennsylvania, bears mate primarily from early June to mid-July. Males are very aggressive towards each other at this time. Sows give birth in January; litters number one to five. The newborns, cubs, are blind, toothless, and covered with short, fine hair that seems to inadequately cover their pink skin. Cubs nurse in the den while the sow sleeps. Nurtured with the sow's rich milk, they grow from as light as 10 ounces at birth to as much as 10 pounds by the time they leave the den in early April. Males do not help rear young.

Most cubs stay with the sow for a little more than a year. They watch her every move and learn by imitating her. Cubs are playful, regularly romping and wrestling with their littermates. The sows are very protective of cubs, sending them up trees if danger threatens. Adult males occasionally kill and eat cubs. The family group disbands when the cubs are about a year and a half old and the sow is again ready to breed.



### If you live in bear country

If you live or have a summer home in bear country, you may need to make some accommodations to coexist peacefully with these large animals. Make sure you don't encourage bears to become problem bears by putting your garbage where it's available to them or, even worse, by intentionally feeding them.

Black bears will consume almost anything. They will eat human food, garbage, bird feed, pet foods and livestock feed. They also raid cornfields and beehives. Once bears find easily accessible food sources, whether on a farm or in a housing development, they lose their wariness of people and will keep coming back as long as food is available. The best way to get rid of these unwanted visitors is to remove the food source for a month or more, but even then, there are no guarantees. A persistent bear may damage property, increase the risk of human injury, or become an unwanted visitor in other parts of the neighborhood. And, all too often, **fed bears become dead bears.**

Perhaps the best way to keep bears from being attracted to your home is to keep them from finding food there in the first place. Store trash, bird seed and pet food inside a



building, garage or secure shed. Don't put out your trash until the morning of collection day. Be sure garbage cans are cleaned regularly, with hot water and chlorine bleach.

If you have pets, bring their food pans inside at night. And when it comes to dogs, bears generally steer clear of chained or penned dogs. Unleashed dogs that approach bears, however, may be injured or killed. If you have a dog in bear country, don't let it roam far from the house, leash it whenever you hike in the woods, and keep it in the house or in a kennel at night.

Other tips include cleaning the grill after every use, and properly disposing of grill grease. Don't dump the grease out back. If you feed birds during summer (and if you're living in bear country, you shouldn't be), you may want to bring all bird feeders, including hummingbird feeders, in at night. Bears also are attracted to fruit, vegetable wastes and other tasty items in mulch or compost piles, so keep your gardens and areas around fruit trees cleaned up, too.

Beehives attract bears, especially right after the bruins come out of hibernation in the spring and during the peak honey production period of late summer and fall. Electric fences are the best way to protect bees, honey and equipment. Contact the Pennsylvania Game Commission for more information about fencing.

Black bears are also attracted to corn, especially in the milk stage. Bears can devastate cornfields. Call the Game Commission if bears are causing extensive damage; officers may be able to help.

Recreational feeding areas — dumpsters, garbage pits and wildlife feeders where people gather to see bears — are particularly bad. Bears that frequent these areas often lose their natural fear of humans, and they're also the ones most likely to be found climbing onto porches or even breaking into houses to investigate enticing smells. Other times they raid bird feeders, clean out dog dishes, kill domestic animals, or rifle through garbage containers.

If a bear is visiting your property, there are two possible courses of action. The first is to make loud noises or shout at the bear, like you'd react to a dog getting into your trash, but keep your distance. The second option is to leave the bear alone, and clean up the bear's mess after it leaves. Follow up by making sure you eliminate whatever attracted the bear in the first place. You may need to talk to your neighbors, as well.

If bears are regularly feeding at a site, encourage your neighbors or community to clean up and close the area. Don't wait until bears start roaming the neighborhood or spectators become a problem. Eliminate the feeding source; it's what lured the bears to your area.

*Because the feeding of bears is the cause of so many bear related problems, it is now against the law to put out food for bears. It's also against the law to put out any feed, for any wildlife, that is causing bears to congregate in or habituate to an area.*



## Camping and hiking in bear country

Although black bears are generally shy and avoid contact with humans, it's important to remember that bears must be respected for their size and strength. Do not deliberately approach a bear or try to become chummy with one, especially one that appears unafraid of you. Be smart: Keep your distance.

If you camp or hike in bear country, do everything you can to prevent close encounters and conflicts with bears. Giving a bear food will encourage it to approach other, unsuspecting people, which could then lead to an unpleasant or possibly dangerous encounter, and could lead to the bear having to be destroyed. In essence, never reward a bear for associating with people. It's what's best for you, the next person and the bear.



### When afield in Penn's Woods:

1. Keep your camp clean and odor free. Wipe tables and clean eating utensils thoroughly after every meal. Burn all grease off grills and camp stoves.
2. Store your food in safe or bear-proof places, in your car trunk, for example, or suspended from a tree branch. **Never have food in your tent.**
3. Dispose of garbage properly. Use the camp receptacles if provided, or store trash in your vehicle. Pack out your garbage if you must, but never leave your garbage behind.
4. If you hike at dawn or dusk, or where hearing or visibility is impaired (roar of fast moving water, thick vegetation), reduce your chances of surprising a bear by talking or making noise.
5. Leave dogs at home or keep them on a leash.

In short, keep your entire campsite free of all food smells.



### What to do if you meet a bear

Bear attacks are extremely rare, especially considering how often people encounter them. In most cases, a bear will detect you first and leave the area long before you'll ever see it. However, if you do meet a bear before it's had time to leave, here are some suggestions. But remember, every bear encounter is different.

**Stay calm** — If you see a bear and it hasn't seen you, leave the area calmly. While moving away, talk to help the bear discover your presence.

**Get back** — If you have a close encounter, back away slowly while facing the bear. Avoid direct eye contact, which a bear may perceive as a threat. Give the bear plenty of room to escape.

Wild bears rarely attack people unless they feel threatened or provoked. If you're on a trail, step off on the downhill side and slowly leave the area.

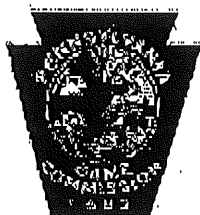
**Don't climb or run** — If a cub is nearby, try to move away from it. But be alert, there could be other cubs. Never climb a tree to escape, because sows chase their cubs up trees when they detect danger. If you climb a tree, a sow may interpret that as an attempt to get her cubs. Stay on the ground and don't make any sudden movements. Running may prompt the bear to give chase; nobody can outrun a bear.

**Pay attention** — Bears will use all of their senses to figure out what you are. If they recognize you as a person, some may stand upright or move closer in their efforts to detect odors in the air currents. Don't consider this a sign of aggression. Once a bear identifies you, it will usually leave.

However, if the bear stays, it may pop its jaws as a warning sign that it's uncomfortable. That's a sign for you to leave. Back away and slowly leave the area. If the jaw popping warning is ignored, some bears have been known to bluff charge to within a few feet. If this occurs, wave your arms wildly and shout at the bear.

**Fight Back** — Again, black bear attacks are extremely rare. However, they have occurred. If a bear attacks, fight back. Bears have been driven away when people have fought back with rocks, sticks, binoculars and even their bare hands.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission is responsible for managing, conserving and protecting all wildlife, and is committed to doing everything possible to keep bear problems to a minimum. Extending the bear season where bear problems are most common, and prohibiting the feeding of bears are but the latest measures taken to help alleviate problems with bears. If you are having a problem with a bear and have no success using these suggestions, or if you have been attacked by a bear, please contact the Pennsylvania Game Commission at the following telephone numbers:



Northwest Region Office	814-432-3188	Southcentral Region Office	814-643-1831
Southwest Region Office	724-238-9523	Northeast Region Office	570-675-1143
Northcentral Region Office	570-398-4744	Southeast Region Office	610-926-3136
Harrisburg Headquarters		717-787-4250	

For more on the Pennsylvania Game Commission, visit [www.pgc.state.pa.us](http://www.pgc.state.pa.us)