

## Finding More Information

If you have persistent bear problems or want more information on bears, contact your local DNR Wildlife & Heritage Service office or one of the offices listed below.

Maryland Department of Natural Resources  
Wildlife & Heritage Service  
Tawes State Office Building  
580 Taylor Avenue  
Annapolis, MD 21401  
Telephone: 410-260-8540  
Toll Free: 877-620-8DNR  
TTY users call via the MD Relay  
www.dnr.Maryland.gov

Wildlife Service Offices – Western Maryland  
Garrett County  
Mt. Nebo Wildlife Management Area  
1728 Kings Run Road  
Oakland, MD 21550  
301-334-4255

Allegany County  
Cumberland Regional Office  
3 Pershing Street, Room 110  
Cumberland, MD 21502  
301-777-2136

Washington & Frederick Counties  
Indian Springs Wildlife Management Area  
14038 Blairs Valley Road  
Clear Spring, MD 21722  
301-842-2702

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# Maryland's Bear Country



## Learning to Live With Black Bears

## INTRODUCTION

Black bears have an interesting history as part of Maryland's natural heritage. In pre-colonial times, bears existed throughout the area that is now the state. Early settlers considered the bear a dangerous and fatal element that only added fear and misery to their existence. As our pioneer ancestors cleared forests thereby destroying the bears' habitat, bears were extirpated from most areas of the state. However, since the 1980's the future of Maryland's black bear population has changed dramatically. Bear numbers have steadily increased in western Maryland due to improving habitat conditions and conservation efforts in Maryland and its surrounding states.

Probably no other wildlife species can reflect the true feeling of "wildness" better than the black bear. Encounters with bears are remembered and retold for years to come. It is refreshing to discover that a native wildlife species has returned when most current news of wildlife concerns habitat losses and associated population declines. The sight of a bear is proof that Maryland has suitable and extensive forest habitat for this wide-ranging animal. In fact, bears are common throughout western Maryland.

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) - Wildlife and Heritage Service manages bears by:

- ◆ Providing quality bear habitat through sound forestry practices.
- ◆ Conducting research to increase knowledge of bear biology.
- ◆ Educating the public on ways to co-exist with bears.
- ◆ Assisting citizens experiencing human/bear conflicts.

## BEARS AND PEOPLE

Bears and people meet under a variety of circumstances. Bears are typically wary of people and will often leave an area as soon as they detect their presence. Seeing a bear in the wild can be a memorable experience. However, bears can become habituated to people, creating many problems for both people and bears.

Black bears can become a nuisance, particularly for people who live near prime bear habitat. Conflicts between people and bears arise when bears damage personal property, beehives, livestock, and agricultural crops. Bears also can create problems when they visit homes, resorts, campgrounds, and restaurants. Although some bears become used to people, they are still wild animals no matter how "tame" they may appear. People must always be cautious around bears since wild animals may react unpredictably.

A bear will take advantage of any foods available and will attempt to eat anything that resembles food in looks, smell, or taste. When natural foods such as nuts, berries, insects, carrion, and tender vegetation are scarce, bears search actively for other food sources. Although bears live primarily in forested areas, they sometimes visit fields and houses or wander into cities and towns hunting for food. When bears find a food source, they will usually return to that source regularly. This is when bears most often come in contact with people and become troublesome.

## SOLVING BEAR PROBLEMS

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources- Wildlife and Heritage Service works to reduce conflicts between bears and people in order to avoid unnecessary loss of bears and to maintain public support for sound bear management.

People share in the responsibility to avoid conflicts with bears. Learning effective measures to prevent bear problems will help both bears and people. **The best way to avoid bear problems is to take precautions to not attract them in the first place.**

The following measures will help prevent problems around the home, farm, business and when outdoors in bear country. If a problem occurs and continues, contact your local Maryland Wildlife and Heritage Service office at one of the numbers listed at the back of this publication.



**NEVER FEED BEARS** – They will associate people with food and may become a persistent problem for you and your neighbors. **It is illegal to feed bears in Maryland.**

## HOMES AND CABINS

Trash and bird feeders are the most common attractants responsible for luring bears to human dwellings. Pet food, charcoal grills, fruit trees and gardens may also attract bears. Once a bear finds food around your home it will likely return.

**To minimize bear problems on your property:**

- ◆ Reduce garbage odors. Rinse food cans and wrappers before disposal.
- ◆ Compost vegetable scraps properly away from house.

- ◆ Keep meat scraps in the freezer until garbage pickup day.
- ◆ Wash garbage cans regularly and use lime to cut odors.
- ◆ Keep garbage cans in a bear-proof container or in an enclosed building until trash pickup.
- ◆ Remove bird feeders in the spring. If you persist in feeding during summer, remove seed, suet and hummingbird feeders at night.
- ◆ Keep pet food inside.
- ◆ Keep barbecue grills and picnic tables clean.
- ◆ Use an energized fence to keep bears out of beehives, sweet corn, fruit trees and berry patches. (An energized fence is powered by a low-impedance, high-voltage energizer that provides a short-duration, high-energy impulse.)
- ◆ Barking dogs, bright lights and noisemakers will sometimes discourage bears from coming into an area.

**If a bear comes into your yard:**

- ◆ DON'T PANIC! DON'T SHOOT! DON'T APPROACH IT!
- ◆ Back away slowly.
- ◆ Go inside and wait for the bear to leave.
- ◆ Most bears fear people and will leave when they see you. If a bear woofs, snaps its jaws, slaps the ground or brush, or bluff charges: YOU ARE TOO CLOSE!
- ◆ Learn to tolerate bears. Many bears are killed or injured when not causing problems.

**If a bear refuses to leave:**

- ◆ Be sure you have allowed the bear an escape route.
- ◆ Make loud noises to scare it away.

**If a bear is treed:**

- ◆ LEAVE IT ALONE! The bear will usually go away when it feels safe.
- ◆ Have people leave the area.
- ◆ Remove your dog from the area.

**CAMPING AND OTHER ACTIVITIES**

If you encounter a bear while in the outdoors, remain calm. DON'T PANIC. Leave the area.

**To reduce the chance of experiencing bear problems:**

- ◆ Move to another campsite if fresh bear signs are present.
- ◆ NEVER keep food in your tent.
- ◆ Use canned and dried foods to minimize food odors.
- ◆ Store foods out of a bear's reach, in a vehicle or enclosed building if possible (see Figure 1).
- ◆ Use airtight or bear-proof containers.

- ◆ Burn waste paper in your campfire.
- ◆ DO NOT BURN OR BURY FOOD SCRAPS!
- ◆ Remove all garbage and fish remains from camp EVERY EVENING.

Seeing bears can be very enjoyable. However, having a bear in camp can lead to problems that will persist long after you have gone home. If a problem becomes serious, your safety and the bear's safety may become jeopardized.

**If a bear comes into camp:**

- ◆ DON'T FEED IT! Scare it away.
- ◆ Make loud noises, bang pans, yell or use air horns.



Figure 1 - Tie your food bag 10 feet above the ground and 10 feet away from the tree so bears can't reach it

It is rare when a bear cannot be chased away. Remember to leave a clear escape route for the bear. Bears may make aggressive sounds or possibly bluff charge when they feel threatened. When a bear bluff charges, it may stop several yards or just a few feet short of the threat. Remember, if a bear exhibits these behaviors, it is telling you that YOU ARE TOO CLOSE!

Spray repellents containing capsaicin (hot pepper liquid) are available to discourage bold bears. These repellents are effective and will not permanently damage the bear's eyes or make the bear aggressive. CAUTION! Care must be taken when using these products. Be sure to follow all label instructions.

**RESORTS, CAMPGROUNDS and RESTAURANTS**

Food odors and garbage may attract bears to establishments.

**Problems arise when:**

- ◆ People are in close contact with bears.
- ◆ Bears damage personal property.
- ◆ Bears become dependent on a human food source.
- ◆ Bears scatter garbage.

**To help reduce bear problems:**

- ◆ Use bear-proof trash cans and dumpsters.
- ◆ Move cans or dumpsters away from areas used by people.
- ◆ Pick up garbage and fish remains promptly every evening.

- ◆ Wash cans and dumpsters frequently.
- ◆ Use lime to cut odors.
- ◆ A 10% ammonia solution may be used as a disinfectant and a bear deterrent.

**Teach people:**

- ◆ DO NOT FEED BEARS!
- ◆ DO NOT STORE FOOD IN TENTS!
- ◆ Store food out of sight in a car trunk or cabin.
- ◆ Rinse containers before disposal and recycle.

These precautions will help reduce bear problems. When you find a system that works, stay with it.

**AGRICULTURE**

Landowners sometimes experience bear problems with beehives, standing crops, orchards, and livestock.

**To control problems:**

- ◆ Corral animals close to buildings at night.
- ◆ Promptly bury dead animals or take them to a rendering plant.
- ◆ Eliminate on-farm garbage dumps.
- ◆ Monitor crops to detect problems early.
- ◆ Consider electric fencing as a preventive measure.

Beehives contain the perfect bear food, honey and larvae, which supply a source of both carbohydrates and protein. To a bear, there is little difference between a beehive and a hollow tree, except that a hive is probably easier to crack open. Bears will eat standing corn, and can severely damage fruit trees. Bears rarely prey on livestock, but on occasion sheep, swine, and poultry have been taken. Bears are often blamed unnecessarily for predation, because they are observed feeding on dead animals. However, these animals typically have died from other causes (stillborn calves, for example).

Because of the potential large financial losses, bears are especially troublesome in orchards and beehives. Energized fences are the best long-term control measure for these situations. These fencing systems will prevent wildlife damage when installed and maintained properly. If damage occurs, immediately contact your local office of DNR's Wildlife & Heritage Service for technical recommendations.

**AN APPROACH FOR MINIMIZING BEAR/HUMAN CONFLICTS**

Bears can easily become used to human activities. This occurs especially when bears learn to associate people with food. Unfortunately, this can lead to a bear losing its natural fear of people. Bears are intelligent, opportunistic feeders. They will return to places where they have found an easy meal. Human habituated bears can create situations that are dangerous for both humans and bears.

The DNR-Wildlife & Heritage Service has implemented the following list of strategies to meet the demands of Maryland's growing black bear population.

1. A black bear response team is on call 24 hours a day seven days a week to respond to emergencies. DNR staff also provide aversive conditioning.
2. A comprehensive outreach and education plan is in effect to educate Marylanders and visitors about living with black bears.
3. The Black Bear Compensation Stamp Fund compensates landowners who have suffered agricultural damage as a result of black bears.
4. Wildlife & Heritage Service staff provide technical assistance to landowners who are experiencing bear problems.
5. Wildlife & Heritage Service will provide electric fencing and technical support for beekeepers experiencing problems with bears around beehives.

Aversive conditioning is a tool used by DNR to change bear behavior. It provides negative feedback to problem bears. The unpleasant experience discourages individual bears from repeating undesirable behavior. Aversive conditioning may include one or more of the following actions applied by trained DNR staff.

- ◆ Chemical irritant (capsaicin spray) applied at close range to the face of the bear.
- ◆ The use of noise making pyrotechnics (screamers, explosive scare shells, rockets) fired in the direction of the bear.
- ◆ Non-lethal rubber projectiles fired from a shotgun at the rump or shoulder of the bear.

The Black Bear Compensation Program reimburses landowners who have suffered agricultural damage as a result of black bears. Funds are raised through the sale of the Black Bear Conservation Stamp and product line. To purchase a stamp or product please visit us on line at <http://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/> or call 410-260-8559.