

DEC Offers Tips to Help Prevent Encounters with Black Bears

Campers, Hikers, and Homeowners Can All Help Deter Bears

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) today reminded campers, hikers and homeowners to take precautions against unwanted encounters with black bears while enjoying the outdoors.

There are approximately 4,000 - 5,000 bears in New York's northern bear range, primarily in the Adirondacks. Approximately 1,800 - 2,500 bears live in the southern bear range, which includes the Catskills and parts of central and western New York. Bear populations, particularly in the southern bear range, have been increasing in number and expanding in distribution over the past decade.

Black bears will become a nuisance and can cause significant damage if they believe they can obtain an easy meal from bird feeders, garbage cans, dumpsters, barbecue grills, tents, vehicles, out-buildings or houses. When bears learn to obtain food from human sources, their natural foraging habits and behavior are changed. Once a bear becomes a problem, DEC is often asked to intervene. However, bear relocations are rarely effective at solving the problem. Relocated bears often return to their original capture site or simply continue their bad habits at a new location. If the circumstances that led to the original problem are not corrected, other bears will quickly be attracted to the site and the problems will persist. Bears that become accustomed to obtaining food from humans will often become bold and assertive in their quest for food, potentially leading to property damage or dangerous situations for humans. Unfortunately, this often results in DEC having to euthanize the bear, echoing the adage, "a fed bear is a dead bear."

Black Bears Around Residences:

These problems can be minimized by taking these simple precautions:

- Never feed bears.
- If you believe that bears are being fed, intentionally or unintentionally, immediately report it to DEC.
- Stop feeding birds as soon as the snow melts. Birds do not need supplemental food in the summer, when natural foods are most abundant. Clean up all seed fragments and shells left over from winter feeding as the smell will attract bears.
- Dispose of garbage as frequently as possible. Store it in clean, secure containers (top-latched, tied or chained). Sprinkle ammonia inside the garbage bag before closing. Tie off garbage bags before placing them in containers.
- Keep garbage in cans inside buildings whenever possible.
- If garbage is picked up at the curb, put the garbage out just before the scheduled pickup or place it in a roadside bear-resistant container. Do not put garbage out the night before curbside pick-up. Clean garbage cans frequently with ammonia.

- Do not add meat scraps, bones or melon rinds to your compost pile.
- Do not burn garbage, especially meat scraps and grease.
- Clean barbecue grills before night fall and, after they cool down, store them inside;
- Feed pets indoors and store pet food indoors. If pets must be fed outdoors, take in all uneaten food and dishes before dark.
- Turn off kitchen exhaust fans that vent to the outside whenever possible.

Black Bears Around Campsites and Hiking Trails:

While hiking and camping in New York, follow these practices:

- Store food, toiletries and garbage in bear resistant containers or "food hangs." If you have no choice but to hang your food, be sure to use a dark colored cord. The cord should be 75 feet long and the bag should be hung 15 feet above the ground and at least 10 feet away from trees.
- Keep food in hangs or in bear resistant containers at all times, take down only what is needed for cooking. Bear resistant canisters are a highly effective means for preventing bears from getting food, toiletries and garbage from back country campers. For more information about bear resistant containers, visit the DEC website.
- Bear resistant containers are required to be used by all overnight campers within the Eastern High Peaks Wilderness Zone of the Adirondack Forest Preserve.
- Never leave food unattended unless it is in a bear resistant container or in a food hang.
- Never cook or eat in your sleeping area.
- Cook early, no later than 5 p.m. if at all possible.

When camping in developed campgrounds campers should follow these rules:

- Do not leave coolers or food out at any time. Store them securely in either the trunk of your car or in the passenger area of your truck. Keep windows shut and food and coolers out of sight.
- Where food lockers are provided, food and coolers must be stored and locked inside.
- Clean up immediately after all meals.
- Keep grills, pots, pans, cooking utensils, and wash basins clean when not in use.
- Do not wash dishes under the water faucets.
- Do not put grease, garbage, plastic diapers, cans, bottles or other refuse into the fireplace.
- Do not keep food or coolers in your tent.
- Do not wear clothing to bed that was worn while preparing or eating meals.
- Keep campsites as clean as possible. Bring all garbage and recyclables to the recycling center each day by 8 p.m.

While these rules are required to be followed at DEC campgrounds, campers at other private and public campgrounds are also strongly encouraged to follow these practices to avoid bear encounters.

For additional information about bears in New York State and the initiatives DEC is employing to help study and manage the population, visit the DEC website.