



Bear Facts

(Ursis americanus)

Understanding the habits and habitats of wildlife, and taking appropriate measures to prevent unwanted encounters, will help everyone to continue to enjoy the wonderful wild resources that still exist in New Jersey.

The Bear Facts:

The American black bear is once again our neighbor. With an understanding of their habits and habitats, it is possible to coexist peacefully.

Black Bears Rarely Attack

As with most wild species, if there is a way to avoid human contact, bears will. There have been fewer than 100 fatal bear attacks in all of North America in the past 100 years. You are more likely to be killed by a bee and 160,000 times more likely to be killed in a car accident. The natural temperament of black bears is nonchalance.

Black Bears are Mainly Vegetarians

Approximately 80% of a black bear's diet consists of fruits, nuts, berries, seeds, leaves, grasses, tubers, and roots. The other 20% consists of easy meat, such as carrion, small mammals, and insects. Bears normally forage in the cool morning and evening hours.

Black Bear Habitat

Black bears prefer primarily wooded areas with open space and available water sources nearby. The home range for males can be 10 to 30 square miles, while females range from 2 to 10 square miles.

Black Bear Sizes

Black bears are blind and hairless at birth and weigh 1/2 to 1 pound. The cubs stay with their mother for 18 months. Adult male bears weigh 200 to 300 pounds; females weigh 175 to 300 pounds. Their weight depends on available food sources, which may change due to drought or disease which could eliminate entire natural food crops.

A word about aggressive behavior.

As with any group, there are occasional rogue or bad bears. They are not the norm. Any aggressiveness is usually around a food source. The bear uses a variety of sounds and movements to communicate its fear, concern, and defensiveness. The sounds include a loud blowing noise or snort and a sound made by smacking its jaws together, both the reaction of a scared or alarmed bear. The movements include a short lunge that may be accompanied by slapping the ground, which is the bear's way of saying, "Move back". Another movement is a bluff charge, which may be a combination of the above. These displays are exactly how bears communicate with each other and are rarely a prelude to anything else. A bear will usually retreat after it has had its say, unless there is a food source or cubs nearby.

Black bears are native to New Jersey and, for the past 30 years, they have been on the protected species list. Through general habitat protection, green ways, and land use regulations, the bear and its habitat have recovered. New Jersey habitat is still diverse enough to support a healthy and recovering population of a species that was almost lost.

About Mercer County Wildlife Center

The Mercer County Wildlife Center is a state and federally licensed facility that cares for injured, ill and displaced wildlife. The Center provides these animals with the medical treatment and a temporary refuge before releasing them back into an appropriate wild habitat.

For more information regarding the work we do and the animals who share our environment, including a series of printable brochures that provide tips for coexisting peacefully with those animals, visit us online at:

www.mercercounty.org/departments/mercer-county-park-commission/wildlife-center

For information on protecting bee hives and livestock, contact the Division of Fish and Wildlife Wildlife Control Unit at (908) 735-8793.

There have been fewer than 100 fatal bear attacks in all of North America in the past 100 years.



The black bear is one species of bear that lives comfortably in close proximity to people. While formidable at first sight, the bear is simply another wild animal whose habits and habitats should be understood in order to peacefully coexist with them.

They are here to stay and are an important part of New Jersey's native wild resources.

The habits and habitats of wildlife and taking appropriate measures to prevent unwanted encounters will help everyone to continue to enjoy the wonderful wild resources that still exist in New Jersey.

There is a bear in my yard! What do I do?

If you do nothing to make a bear feel unwelcome, it will consider your yard to be a safe place. It is fairly easy to scare a bear away unless, of course, it is neck deep in food. Loud noises such as clapping hands, stomping feet, and yelling should encourage the bear to move on. You may, at first, see some of the signs described on the first page of this fact sheet, but the bear will probably not stick around. You can also try shaking plastic garbage bags or banging pots to startle a bear into leaving, or use an air horn or even play a musical instrument. Be creative!

DO NOT:

- Do not approach bears.
- Do not feed bears. Sooner or later, a bear that is regularly fed by people (whether intentionally or unintentionally) becomes a problem bear created by people.
- Do not feed pets outside. If you cannot avoid feeding pets outside, pick up food and water bowls, as well as leftovers and spilled food, well before dusk. Never leave food outside at night.
- Do not feed birds during summer months. If you want to continue feeding birds during the summer, however, bring the feeders in at night or hang them from a wire (away from trees, shrubs, or buildings) at least 8 feet from the ground.

DO:

- Keep your garbage in bear-proof containers or in airtight containers in a closed garage or shed. Do not put them out until the day of pick-up. Consider freezing particularly smelly items such as fish or meat until trash day.
- Keep your barbecue grill clean and store it in a closed garage or shed.
- Look around your home to ensure that there is nothing to encourage the company of bears. If you don't mind having the bear wander through your yard, then have a camera ready and enjoy the magnificent sight!



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Dan Benson, *County Executive*

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