



Living with Black Bears in Rhode Island

Black bear populations have been increasing in recent years in the northeastern United States. As a result, black bear sightings in Rhode Island have been increasing and will likely become more common in the future. Bears have an excellent sense of smell and may be attracted to birdfeeders, trashcans, compost piles or other sources of food in your backyard.

Black Bear Biology

Black bears are the only bear species found in Rhode Island. They have black fur with a brown muzzle and occasionally a white blaze on their chest. Their strong limbs are equipped with claws which they use for climbing and digging. Adult black bears are four to six feet long, with the adult females generally weighing 100 to 250 pounds, and the adult males weighing an average 150 to 450 pounds.

Behavior

Black bears are crepuscular, which means they are most active at dawn and dusk. They are not true hibernators, but do go through a dormancy period where they drop their body temperature and become relatively inactive. Black bears tend to be shy, docile creatures. They are normally solitary, except for female and cub groups. Black bears are highly intelligent and will adapt to human presence when the need arises, especially if food is available where humans exist.

Diet

Although bears are in the taxonomic order Carnivora, their diet consists mostly of grasses, leaves, berries, flowers, roots and nuts, as well as meat. Only a small percent of their diet contains animal matter, mainly insects and carrion (*i.e.*- road kill, abandoned carcasses). In fact, their back teeth have evolved from a shearing, cutting function to a grinding function to compensate the change to an omnivorous diet. Bears are opportunistic feeders. When their natural food supply is scarce, they will utilize other food sources. Their keen sense of smell may lead them to bird feeders, garbage bins, campgrounds, commercial beehives and compost piles. When bears locate an abundant available food source, like a garbage bin, they may return to utilize those resources.

For information or to report sightings, please contact: the Department of Environmental Management **Division of Fish and Wildlife: (401) 789-0281**

or in case of an emergency, please contact the **Environmental Police: (401) 222-3070**

Habitat and Reproduction

The best bear habitat is thickly vegetated forests with wetlands and riparian habitat in close proximity. When inactive in the winter, they will den in standing snags or hollow trees, under fallen trees, rock crevices or densely-covered ground sites. Females have their first litter between 2 to 5 years old, and do so once every other year. Mating occurs in June and July, but embryonic development doesn't begin until late fall. Two to four cubs are born in January and weigh only 8 to 10 ounces. The young stay with their mother for about 16 months.



RI Sightings

Bears have been sighted in Providence County, Washington County and Kent County. Important sighting information includes the exact location of the bear, the estimated size of the bear, the bear's activity, whether the bear is alone or with cubs, and if there are colored tags in the bears ear.



Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management
Division of Fish and Wildlife

Tips to Keep Bears Out of Your Backyard

Bears can travel long distances in search of available food sources. It is unhealthy for wild animals to become dependent on humans for survival, so here are some simple trips to keep the bears where they belong.

- Bird seed has a high protein content and is attractive to bears, it should be removed from feeders by early April until November before it is put back out
- Keep garbage cans/receptacles secured or stored inside shed or garage until the morning of trash pickup
- Keep grills clean to minimize attractive odors
- Do not leave pet food outside over night
- **DO NOT FEED BEARS**

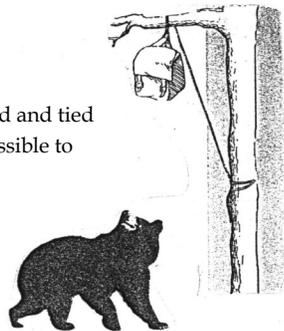


Fig. 1- Food hoisted and tied off in a tree, inaccessible to bears

Tips to keep bears out of campgrounds

- Use common sense
- Keep your camp clean
- Keep food stored in a vehicle or hanging from a tree so bears cannot reach it (figure 1) Utilize bear-proof garbage containers



Fig. 2- Bear-proof garbage cans, stops bear from knocking it over or pulling off lid. Courtesy of <http://commons.wikimedia/bear-resistant-trash-can>

Protect Your Livestock

Black bears' diet consists mainly of plant material, but occasionally when food is scarce, they may attack animals for food.

- If possible, pen your animals in the barn at night
- Install electric fencing
- Do not leave dead carcasses in pasture or anywhere near farm. Completely bury or incinerate them.

Protect Your Beehives

- Locate hives as far from the forest edge as possible
- Install electric fencing

What To Do If You Encounter A Bear

- First, remain calm. Do not run- slowly walk away while facing the bear
- If a bear feels threatened, cornered or scared it may bluff charge you. Back away slowly while making noise ("Hey bear, go away bear").
- Spray repellents made for dogs will work on bears.

Helpful Hints:

- *Travel in groups*
- *Never approach a bear to get a picture or a better look*
- *Never come between a bear and its cubs*

Installing electric Fencing

Electric fencing is considered one of the best methods for deterring bears. Below are a few good resources on the use, installation and maintenance of these fences:

- "Deterring Bears with Electrified Fencing: A starter's guide to constructing a front country electric fence" by Kim Annis, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
- "Electric Fencing for Bears, A highly effective deterrent" Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
- <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=livingwithbears.bearfences>
- www.bearsmart.com/work/beekeepers

