

# New Hampshire's Black Bears

*Ursus americanus*

## RANGE:

The black bear occurs over much of the United States, Canada and into Mexico. In the northeast, they occur over a wider range and in greater abundance than they have in nearly 200 years. In New Hampshire, black bears are found in all 10 counties, and their population today approaches 3,800.

## DESCRIPTION:

Black bears are large mammals with powerful limbs, small heads and small rounded ears. Female black bears weigh 125-150 pounds, while adult males weigh 200-250 pounds. Most black bears in the Northeast are all black with a brown or tan muzzle; some may have a small white chest patch, called a blaze.

## FOOD HABITS:

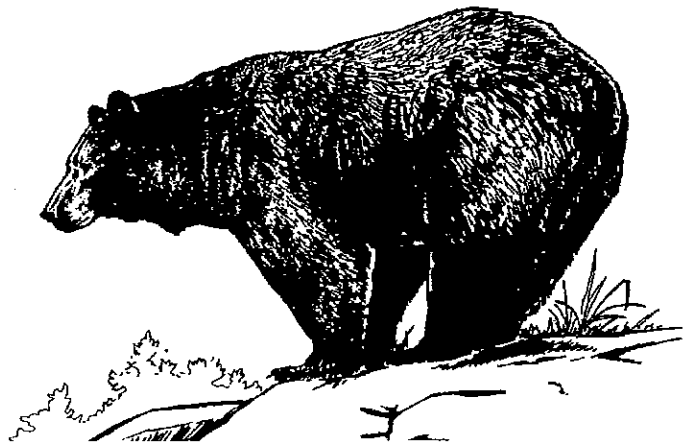
Black bears change their diet seasonally, taking advantage of available foods. When they emerge from their den in the spring, black bears eat grasses, leaves and other newly emerged succulent plants. In summer they shift to more nutritious foods, including berries, fruits, roots, blossoms and insects. Hard mast — primarily beechnuts and acorns — are their staple in the fall. Other fall foods include cherries, apples and mountain ash berries. When natural foods are not abundant, black bears will seek alternative foods, such as corn crops, commercial bee hives, garbage, suet and bird seed.

## HABITAT:

Black bears inhabit forested areas with thick understory vegetation. Wetlands and riparian areas are important parts of their habitat. They prefer large tracts of forest with little human disturbance. They may adapt to residential areas if food is available. They may travel more than 100 miles in search of food.

## HABITS AND REPRODUCTION:

Black bears are not true hibernators — they can be roused from their winter sleep. During deep winter sleep, their heart rate and breathing drops 50



to 60 percent, their body temperature drops by 7 to 8 degrees, and they lose a quarter of their weight. Black bears usually den in brush piles, logging slash or hollow trees, under a fallen tree or under rock outcrops.

Females begin breeding at about 4 years of age; most breed once every two years. Females give birth to two or three cubs in late January or early February while the female is denning. The young bears remain with the female for a year and a half.

In spring, summer and fall, bears are usually active during the day, usually before dawn and after dusk. In areas with greater human activity, bears tend to be more active at night. Adult male black bears may range up to 100 square miles, while females usually range only about 10 square miles.

## BEARS AND HUMANS:

People need not fear bears; they should respect them. Black bears are by nature shy and secretive. They're seldom aggressive, even when confronted by humans. Their first response is to flee from humans. The last time a person was killed by a bear in New Hampshire was over 200 years ago, in 1784.

If you see a black bear, make it aware of your presence by talking or making loud noises. The presence or aroma of food or trash may be encouraging it to stay; remove any sight or smell of foods. When they feel threatened, black bears will sometimes bluff charge; stand your ground, yell, and slowly back away. Enjoy watching black bears or other wildlife from a distance.



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# Take Proper Care of Your Garbage



Black bears are one of New Hampshire's most magnificent big mammals. Although bears are shy and usually avoid humans, they are also opportunistic and will search for human food supplies when there's little natural food available. Their keen sense of smell can lead them to trouble — both for themselves and humans. Maintaining a sustainable bear population in New Hampshire depends on minimizing human-bear conflicts. Take proper care of your garbage to help avoid these conflicts.

## **DON'T TRASH OUR BEARS**

- Keep dumpsters and trash containers secured at night. Lock and bolt both tops and sliding side doors, if necessary. Use metal trash cans, including lids.
- Choose adequate sized dumpsters. Don't let dumpster garbage overflow.
- Stabilize smaller dumpsters to prevent bears from tipping them over.
- Rinse out dumpsters with a hose, and deodorize with ammonia if necessary.
- Pick up loose or spilled garbage.
- Erect portable electric fences around dumpsters to reduce bear activity, when necessary.
- Double-bag garbage and place it in air-tight containers to reduce food odors that may attract bears.
- If you keep garbage in a shed, keep the doors closed tightly to prevent bears from forcing them open. If bears get into sheds, move garbage to a more secure location and leave shed doors open after removing attractants. Deodorize with ammonia as necessary.
- Further discourage bears from approaching dumpsters by using loud noise-making devices.
- Never intentionally feed bears to attract them to your yard for viewing. **Remember... a fed bear is a dead bear!**



## **NEW HAMPSHIRE FISH AND GAME DEPARTMENT**

2 Hazen Drive, Concord, NH 03301 • (603) 271-3211

For more information, see — <http://www.wildlife.state.nh.us>



# Tips on Avoiding Unbearable Conflicts



Although black bears are generally shy and usually avoid humans, they are opportunistic and will search for human food supplies when natural foods are not available. Maintaining a sustainable bear population in New Hampshire depends on minimizing human-bear conflicts. The majority of conflicts can be avoided. Here are some tips on preventing bear problems:

## RESIDENTIAL PREVENTION

- Take down, clean and put away bird feeders by mid-April. Bear damage to bird feeders is a common and growing early spring complaint.
- Clean up spilled seed below feeder stations.
- Keep garbage in airtight containers inside your garage or storage area. Double bagging and the use of ammonia will reduce odors that attract bears.
- Garbage for pickup should be put outside the morning of collection and not the night before.
- Do not place meat or sweet food scraps in your compost pile.

- Do not leave pet food or dishes outdoors at night.
- Clean up and/or store outdoor grills after use.
- Use a bear-proof dumpster.
- Do not intentionally feed bears to attract them to your yard for viewing.



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For information on camping or agricultural preventions, contact:  
N.H. Cooperative Animal Damage  
Control Program  
91A North State Street  
Concord, NH 03301-4434  
Tel. (603) 225-1416

## CAMPING PREVENTION

- Maintain a clean campsite.
- Put food scraps and fat drippings in closed containers, not in the campfire.
- Do not cook or eat in your tent.
- Keep food and cooking gear separate from your sleeping area.
- Keep food in a closed-up vehicle or hang food at least 10 feet off the ground and five feet out on a limb that will not support a bear.
- Do not feed bears.

## AGRICULTURAL PREVENTION

- Use electric fencing around beehives and livestock.
- Bury or incinerate livestock carcasses.
- Leave unplanted open lanes between forest and fields.
- Alternate row crops to provide less cover.
- Monitor field crops in August to detect damage activity.



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