

SIMPLE STEPS PREVENT BEAR VISITS

CONCORD, N.H. - Don't let your bird feeder (or trash can) turn into a bear feeder, warns New Hampshire Fish and Game Bear Project Leader Andrew Timmins. Despite the fact that April felt more like winter than spring, more typical warm weather has finally arrived in the Granite State. Across the entire state, bears have left their dens and are feeding heavily on any food they can find to replenish fat reserves depleted during their long winter denning period. Homeowners should take action now to reduce the chances of a bear visiting their home this spring.

"It is difficult to estimate the frequency of bear/human conflicts that may occur this spring, however we can be sure that bears will seek out the highest quality foods they can find," Timmins said. "The abundant beechnut crop that was present across much of the state last fall will provide important spring food for bears. While this may reduce the numbers of bears that are attracted to human-related food sources, we should anticipate that some animals will search backyards for an easy meal."

During the denning period, bears typically lose 25% of their body weight, and a lactating female with newborn cubs may lose as much as 40%. The greatest nutritional stress on a bear comes one to two months after they come out of their dens. The statewide black bear population is considered relatively stable -- thanks to careful management by Fish and Game -- and is currently approximately 5,000 bears.

"The surest way to prevent property damage and reduce concerns over human safety is to keep your yard - or campsite - free of attractants including food, garbage, birdseed and pet foods. You may need to take additional steps to protect items that can't be removed. For example, dumpsters should have a locking metal top that prevents access by bears, and beehives and livestock should be protected with an electric fence. To avoid bear-related conflicts, prevent bears from visiting and, most of all, from getting in the habit of finding food on your property," said Timmins.

Feeding bears is not only a bad idea, it may get you into legal trouble. State law prohibits the purposeful or inadvertent feeding of black bears following a determination by Fish and Game that the feeding increases the likelihood of human injury or property damage.

Homeowners should take action to reduce the chances of a bear visiting their home. Avoid encounters with bears by taking a few simple precautions:

- * Stop all bird feeding by April 1 or as soon as snow melts.
- * Clean up any spilled birdseed and dispose of it in the trash.
- * Secure all garbage in airtight containers inside a garage or adequate storage area, and

put garbage out on the morning of pickup, not the night before.

- * Avoid putting meat or other food scraps in your compost pile.
- * Don't leave pet food dishes outside overnight.
- * Clean and store outdoor grills after each use.
- * Finally, never intentionally feed bears!

These steps will help to ensure that your backyard does not become attractive to bears and other wildlife, which is important because it prevents property damage by bears and because it keeps bears from becoming nuisance animals.

"It is important that all New Hampshire residents and visitors do their part to prevent conflicts with bears. Preventative actions will avoid the chances of bears causing property damage and are essential to maintaining the state's strong bear population," said Timmins. "There is some truth to the adage that 'a fed bear is a dead bear.' Once they get used to relying on human food sources in your backyard, some 'nuisance' bears may need to be destroyed."

For more information on preventing conflicts with black bears, visit http://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/Wildlife/Somethings_Bruin.htm.

If you have questions about bear-related problems, you can get advice by calling a toll-free number coordinated jointly by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services and the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department: 1-888-749-2327 (1-888-SHY-BEAR).

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