

Herbert Lange



Black Bear

The American black bear is the only bear species in Wisconsin and most common in the northern half of the state, although populations have been slowly expanding southward for the past few decades. Bears are normally solitary forest animals, but their powerful sense of smell can lead them into urban areas in search of food. This is especially true in spring when bears emerge from their winter dens and food is scarce, and fall when bears are gorging to build fat reserves for winter denning. Black bears are secretive animals and usually try to avoid people. However, conflicts with humans can occur when bears destroy gardens, bird feeders, apiaries and trash cans. By understanding bear behavior, there are several ways people can reduce negative human-bear conflicts around their homes.

Do Not Feed Wildlife

- NEVER FEED BEARS. Feeding bears will create a bear habituated to humans. These bears may cause conflicts with other people and eventually may have to be lethally removed.
- Do not store pet food outdoors and keep pet food bowls inside when not in use.
- Store trash, and trash cans if possible, indoors and only place trash outside for pickup on the morning of trash day. Periodically clean trash cans with ammonia to deter bears.
- Do not allow bears to feed at bird feeders. Clean up spilled bird seed and if a bear begins using your feeder, take it down for at least two weeks to allow the bear time to leave the area.
- Clean and store outdoor grills after each use. The grease traps and residual food can attract bears.

Protect Your Pets

- Keep cats indoors and watch dogs when outdoors. Only leave pets unattended when they are secure in a kennel with a covered top.
- Before letting pets outdoors, scan the area for bears. If at night, first turn on a bright outdoor light.

Discourage Bears

- Hang bird feeders at least 10 feet off the ground and 5 feet away from tree trunks. Consider taking down feeders in spring when bears emerge from their dens and are looking for easy food, and at night when bears are most active.
- If you see a bear around your home, make noise so it knows you are there. You do not want to surprise a bear. Most bears will run away upon seeing a person, but banging pots and pans together or making loud noises will help the bear realize that your home is not a safe area to be. All wildlife can act unpredictably, and bears are large, powerful animals. Never approach bears.
- Do not store scented items such as soap on windowsills. These items smell like food to bears and can tempt them to break windows or enter homes.



Quick Facts

- Bears have a sense of smell 7 times greater than that of the bloodhound, and they have been known to locate food from over a mile away. Bears can even smell canned and packaged foods!
- Black bears are omnivores meaning they eat both plants and animals. Black bears will eat deer fawns, insects, and carrion (dead animals), although the bulk of a bear's diet is comprised of fruits, seeds and nuts, and grasses and flowers.
- In fall, when preparing for winter denning, bears can eat up to 20,000 calories a day to build their fat stores.
- Bears are not true hibernators. During winter denning, bears frequently awaken and even give birth, typically 2 or 3 cubs every other year. Bears do not eat, drink, urinate or defecate while denning.
- For nuisance bear assistance, contact USDA-Wildlife Services at 1-800-433-0663 (in southern Wisconsin) or 1-800-228-1368 (in northern Wisconsin).

For more information, visit our webpage:

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