



# LIVING WITH BLACK BEARS IN RHODE ISLAND

## DON'T FEAR THE BEARS!

FOR QUESTIONS, INFORMATION, TO REPORT SIGHTINGS, OR IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY, PLEASE CONTACT THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT:  
DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE  
DIVISION OF ENFORCEMENT

**Division of Fish and Wildlife**  
**(401) 789-0281**

**Division of Enforcement**  
**(401) 222-3070**

### Sources

Figure 1 courtesy of State of Maryland Department of Natural Resources  
Figure 2 courtesy of USDA, APHIS, Wildlife Services  
Pictures courtesy of NH Fish and Game and alaska-bear-pictures.com



## DON'T FEAR THE BEARS!

**Rhode Island Department of  
Environmental Management  
Division of Fish and Wildlife**



*Black bear sightings in Rhode Island have been on the rise. Why? Bears are attracted by their strong sense of smell to available foods at bird feeders or trashcans in your backyard, and they also seek out food in campgrounds. At the same time, they become more comfortable around humans and that is when you see them!*

## **BLACK BEAR BIOLOGY**



### **DESCRIPTION**

Black bears are the only bear species found in Rhode Island. They have black fur, occasionally with a white blaze on the chest, and their muzzle is brown. They have large bodies with strong limbs and well-developed claws for climbing, a narrow head and small round ears. Adult black bears are 4 to 6 feet long. Adult females generally weigh 110 – 180 pounds compared to adult males who average 200 – 300 pounds. Black bears prefer foods high in protein and fat and can get it from human food or garbage. When this happens, bear weights can increase to 600 pounds or more.

### **DIET**

Although bears are in the order Carnivora, their back teeth have evolved from a shearing, cutting function to a grinding function. This makes sense because most of their diet consists of grasses, leaves, berries, flowers, roots and nuts. Only a small percent of their diet contains animal matter, mainly insects and car-  
rion (road kill, dead carcasses). Bears are opportunistic feeders, so when their natural food supply is scarce, they find food by their keen sense of smell at bird feeders, garbage bins, campgrounds, commercial beehives, berry patches and compost piles. When bears locate an abundant available food source, like a commercial beehive or garbage bin, they return to utilize those resources.



## **HABITAT AND REPRODUCTION**

Black bears live in thickly vegetated forests with wetlands and riparian areas in close proximity. Females begin breeding at 4 years of age 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 around January and weigh only 8 – 10 ounces. The young reside with their mother for 16 months. Most nuisance bears are young male bears that tend to wander in search of food and a new territory.



### **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.

### **RI Sightings**

[Bears have been sighted in Providence County, Kent County, and Washington County:](#)

*Bear sightings should be reported to DEM's Division of Fish and Wildlife (401) 789-0281, DEM's Division of Enforcement (401) 222-3070*

*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 bear's ear/ears.*

## TIPS TO KEEP BEARS OUT OF YOUR BACKYARD

*Bears can travel long distances in search of available food sources and may end up right in your backyard! It is unhealthy for wild animals to become dependent on humans for survival, so here are some simple tips to keep the bears where they belong.*

- Since bird seed has a high fat content and an attractiveness to bears, you should remove bird feeders from your yard by mid-April and wait until late October or November to put feeders back out.
- Keep garbage secured or stored inside shed/garage until trash-pickup morning
- Keep fruit and meat out of compost piles
- Clean grills immediately after use to minimize attractive odor
- Don't leave pet food outside over night
- **NEVER FEED BEARS** (they will become more demanding)

## TIPS TO KEEP BEARS OUT OF CAMPGROUNDS

- Keep your camp clean
- Do not cook near your sleeping area
- Keep food stored in a vehicle or hanging from a tree so bears cannot reach it. (Figure 1)
- Wash and remove all scented articles of clothing before slumber.
- Campground facilities can obtain bear-proof garbage cans. (Figure 2)

Figure 1

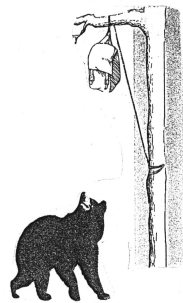
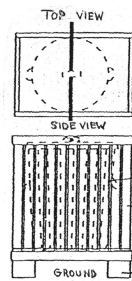


Figure 2

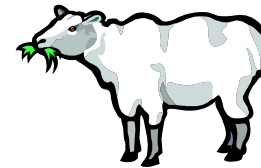


## PROTECT YOUR BEEHIVES BEFORE ANY BEAR DAMAGE OCCURS



- Keep mowed, open corridors surrounding hives
- Erect temporary or permanent fencing (For more detailed information, please contact Div. of Fish & Wildlife (401) 789-0281)

## PROTECT YOUR LIVESTOCK



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

- Avoid pasturing in areas of dense cover where bears may be close by
- If possible, pen your animals in the barn at night or protect your livestock with electric fencing
- Do not leave dead carcasses in pasture or anywhere near farm. Completely bury or incinerate them.

## WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOU ENCOUNTER A BEAR !

- First, remain calm, do not run— usually black bears will retreat once it spots a human
- If it does not retreat, or bluff charges at you, back away slowly
- You can also scare a bear away by yelling, hitting pots & pans, breaking sticks or waving your arms.
- Spray repellents are available to discourage bold bears

### Helpful hints :

- Travel in groups
- Never approach a bear
- Never come between a bear and its cubs