

Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*) Facts



Physical Characteristics

The black bear is the most common and smallest species of bear in North America, and the only wild bear species found in Wisconsin. Adult males range from 250-300 lbs. and adult females range from 120-280 lbs. They are most commonly black, but can also be found in shades of brown or cinnamon.



Diet

Black bears are opportunistic eaters. They are omnivorous, eating both plants and animals. They will most often eat vegetation, berries, insects, and nuts, but will also target other animals. If they are in a farming area, livestock and crops and/or honey or bees can also become part of their diet.



Habitat

Black bears prefer forests, swamps, or anywhere with dense cover. However, they will readily adapt to other habitats if a good food source is available.



Behavior

Black bears are normally shy animals and try to avoid humans. Their home range is about 27 square miles for males, and 8 square miles for females.

During the winter, bears don't truly hibernate. They fall into a deep sleep to conserve energy, but can easily be awakened. While asleep, their heartbeat slows, their body temperature drops and they survive off of fat reserves that they build during the fall.

Nuisance Bears and Agricultural Damage

If there is a nuisance bear in your area or if you are experiencing agricultural damage problems, contact the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Wildlife Services. They will provide information on how best to resolve the situation.

Northern Wisconsin: 1-800-228-1368

Southern Wisconsin: 1-800-433-0663

Orphaned or Injured Bears

Black bear mothers may leave their cubs for up to 15 hours while they search for food elsewhere. If you find bear cubs without their mother, do not handle them. Leave them and call the DNR for further instructions if their mother does not return for them after 15 hours. If you find an injured black bear or a bear cub that is truly orphaned, contact the DNR at 1-888-WDNRINFO (1-888-936-7463) for help to find a licensed wildlife rehabilitator near you. Never attempt to rehabilitate a black bear on your own. A black bear, even a cub, can be dangerous to humans as they fight to defend themselves against a perceived threat (humans or pets). They also have very specific dietary and housing requirements that are not easily met in captivity.



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Living with Black Bears in Wisconsin



Understanding their behavior and preventing conflicts

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Black bears are most commonly found in northern and central Wisconsin and are expanding their range to the south and west. Over 28,000 black bear range throughout the state and their population is growing. Most conflicts with bears can be avoided if best practices are followed.

Avoiding bear conflict...

Black bears are attracted to many commonly used items found around your yard, home or campsite. Problems occur and risk increases when bears begin to associate people with food. If bears find a consistent food source around people, they will make a habit of visiting the area. These habits are hard to break. If a bear regularly associates you or your property with food, the wellbeing of both people and bears is compromised. Never feed a bear!

Scare that bear!

Normally bears are shy around humans and avoid them as much as possible. It is important to reinforce this fear by scaring bears away so that conflicts are reduced. If you see a bear in your yard or around your home:

- Place yourself in a secure area so the bear has a clear escape path. Make a lot of noise by yelling, honking a car horn, or banging pots and pans.
- Install motion-activated water sprinklers, lights or alarms.



While at home

- Feed intended for birds attracts a wide variety of wildlife, including bears. The safest thing to do is to only feed birds in winter, when bears are in their dens. If you choose to place bird feeders during warmer months, they should be brought in at night, and made inaccessible to bears. Hang feeders at least 10 feet off the ground and at least 5 feet from any surface that can support a bear. If bears are observed in the area feeders should be immediately removed.
- Garbage cans should be clean and closed tightly and if possible, kept inside a garage or shed. There should be no loose garbage in the area.
- Composting in known bear territory may present a risk unless compost is properly covered.
- Pet food should be kept indoors, especially at night.
- Outdoor grills should be cleaned and stored after use.

While camping

- Never store food, cooking utensils or other aromatic products (toothpaste, deodorant, soaps etc) in your tent. Instead, store in a vehicle or hang out of reach in a tree at least 100 yards from your sleeping area.
- Campsites should remain clean with all waste, scraps, and garbage removed. Make use of bear-proof garbage canisters if available.
- Avoid establishing wilderness campsites where bear signs, such as scat or tracks, are present.

While hiking

- Hike in groups and make plenty of noise, and always keep pets on a leash.

If you come in contact with a bear...

Never approach a bear. Bears are generally afraid of people, and aggressive behavior is rare. However, a bear will be defensive when protecting their young or a food source. Bears can also become agitated if they are startled. Most of the time a bear will avoid confrontation, but if they become aggressive, here are the proper steps to take:

- Talk to the bear or start shouting if it doesn't leave.
- Raise arms above your head and wave them to appear larger than you are.
- **DO NOT RUN.** Slowly back away and don't turn your back on the bear.
- Always leave an escape route for the bear.
- **DO NOT LIE DOWN and PLAY DEAD.** Fight back if attacked.



Did you spot a bear?

Black bears are exciting wildlife to observe and photograph, but they are wild animals which can pose a threat to human safety. Respect their space and view them at a safe distance.