

You Can Prevent Nuisance Bear Problems

With the increased number of bear sightings on High Knob this year, we offer some helpful ideas for living safely with our animal friends. **BE AWARE IT IS ILLEGAL TO FEED BEARS IN VIRGINIA!**

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries has established the following nuisance bear guidelines that promote public safety, protect property and conserve bear populations. You can minimize negative interaction with bears by addressing problems immediately and following some simple guidelines.

KEEP YOUR PROPERTY CLEAR OF FOOD ATTRACTANTS:

- Secure your garbage: Store garbage indoors, in a shed, in a garage, or a bear proof container.
- Take trash to the dump frequently.
- Pick up pet food: Feed pets only what they will eat in a single feeding or feed the indoors. Pick up uneaten food. Do not leave food out overnight.
- Remove the bird feeder: Bears consume seeds and nuts found in the wild, so bird feeders become a favored target for bears.
- Clean the outdoor grill often.
- Do not put meat scraps or any other strong-smelling food in a compost pile & install electric fencing to protect it.
- Pick up and remove ripe fruit from fruit trees and surrounding grounds.
- Talk to your neighbors: Make sure they are aware of ways to prevent nuisance bear problems.

IF YOU ENCOUNTER A BEAR AT HOME:

- In almost all cases, the bear will detect you first and leave the area. If a bear is on or near your property, do not escalate the situation by approaching, crowding around, or chasing the bear. This also applies to bears that have climbed up a tree. The best thing you can do is leave it alone. Unprovoked bear attacks are very rare and few have been documented in Virginia. If you do meet a bear here are some suggestions:
- Stay calm. If you see a bear and it has not seen you, calmly leave the area.
- Stop. Back away slowly while facing the bear.
- Give the bear plenty of room to escape. Bears rarely attack unless cornered or provoked.
- Do not run or make any sudden movements. Running could prompt the bear to give chase and you cannot outrun a bear. If on a trail, step off the trail and slowly leave the area.
- If there is a bear in your yard and it approaches you, make yourself look big and make loud noises Remain at a safe distance and throw rocks to make the bear feel unwelcome.

- If there is a bear in your house prop open all doors to the outside and get out of the way of the exit. Never close a bear into a room. Make noises and yell at the bear to leave the house. Don't approach the bear, but make sure it knows it is violating your territory.
- If you surprise a bear speak softly. This may reassure the bear that you mean no harm.
- Fight back. If a black bear attacks you, fight back. Black bears have been driving away when people have fought back with rocks, sticks, binoculars and even their bare hands.

COMMON BLACK BEAR MYTHS

Myth: A bear standing on its hind legs is about to charge or attack.

Fact: A bear stands on its hind legs to get a better view and smell of the surroundings. This is not an aggressive posture, just a way to determine who or what piqued its interest.

Myth: Bears are dangerous predators.

Fact: Although classified as carnivores, black bears are omnivores – eating both plants and animals. Over 80% of their diets consist of vegetation, fruit and nuts. The remainder includes mostly insects and larva, carrion, fish and occasionally small mammals.

Myth: One of the most dangerous encounters is getting between a mother black bear and her cubs.

Fact: Because black bears can tree their cubs, it is rare for them to injure a person in that situation. Black bear cubs are great at climbing and will be sent up a tree if the mother bear feels nervous about a situation. Just like with any young animals you never want to try to get near them. If you see a mother bear and cubs give them some space, be quiet, and retreat slowly.

Myth: Bears are unpredictable.

Fact: Bears use body language and vocalizations to show their intentions. Learning about bear behavior can be beneficial to people who travel or live in bear country.

If you are concerned or curious when you see a bear in your yard or neighborhood, call the State Game Warden who deals with wild animals. The Game Warden can be contacted through the Warren County Sheriff's Dispatch Office at (540) 635-4128.