



A FED BEAR IS A DEAD BEAR

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Georgia Black Bear Information

*Black Bear Fact Sheet

*News Release: Black Bear Awareness 101

*Black Bear Photos

*Black Bear Range Map

Media requiring assistance related to black bears (including use of the above graphic) can contact Melissa Cummings (Communications Office) at 706-557-3326 or melissa.cummings@dnr.state.ga.us .

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Wildlife Resources Division
BLACK BEAR FACT SHEET

HISTORY

The Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*) symbolizes the wild qualities of the state. Prior to the eighteenth century, bears were common in Georgia. However, habitat loss, unrestricted hunting, and overall degradation of habitat due to human development contributed to a serious population decline. Thanks to sound wildlife management practices, bears have recovered to the present population of approximately 5,100 statewide.

RANGE

Black bears can typically be found in three distinct regions in Georgia, although they will range over larger areas in search of food. They can be found in the North Georgia mountains, along the Ocmulgee River drainage system in the central part of the state and in the Okefenokee Swamp in the southeast. Young male bears often will roam large areas until they are able to establish their own territory.

HABITAT

Bears typically live in swamps and forested areas, especially mature mixed pine stands that offer a plentiful supply of natural foods and trees and thickets that they can escape to for security. Standing, hollow trees are common den sites for Georgia bears. However, brush piles, rock crevices or other places that offer protection may be used.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

The typical life span of a bear is about 8 to 15 years. Wild bears tend to live 23 percent longer than "garbage" bears (those that exist on unnatural foods). Adult bears are generally up to six feet in length and about three feet high at the shoulder. Female adult bears can weigh up to 300 pounds and attain breeding status about 3.5 - 4.5 years of age. Adult males can weigh over 500 pounds and may breed as early as 1.5 years of age. Bears have poor eyesight but an excellent sense of smell. They are good tree climbers, can swim well and are able to run at speeds of up to 30 miles per hour. Female bears become sexually mature at two to five years of age. The breeding season is in July and cubs are born in the den in late January or February. Bear cubs weigh about eight ounces when born, are relatively undeveloped and entirely dependent on the mother. Cubs stay with their mother throughout the first year, den with her during the following winter and stay with her until she finally drives them away the following spring. Due to this extended care for their young, females only produce a litter every two years.

DIET

Bears are considered omnivorous, meaning their diet consists of whatever is readily available at that time of year. Diets vary according to what part of the state the bear calls home. However, the majority of their natural diet consists

of berries, fruits, acorns, grasses and animal matter, including insects or mammals-even deer. When houses, camps or recreation areas are located within range, bears are naturally attracted to the smells associated with cooking and garbage disposal. Other non-natural attractants include pet food, birdseed, suet, compost piles, gardens, beehives and cornfields. Bears can become attracted to human food when their natural diet sources are scarce. Non-natural type foods are typically easier to obtain and associated with humans, therefore luring bears away from natural food sources and dissolving the bear's natural fear of humans. A bear typically will remain in an area where food can be found until that food supply is gone or until other measures are taken.

NUISANCE

WRD Game Management offices receive numerous bear nuisance calls every year. Typically, the caller expects WRD to capture and relocate the bear. This is usually not the best solution for residents or bears as other bears may move into the "abandoned" territory or the relocated bear, trying to find its way back, is commonly hit by a car. In addition, relocated bears will typically enter into territory conflicts with other bears, resulting in injury or death of one or both bears.

For each nuisance situation, a WRD associate evaluates why the bear is causing problems. Most problems can be resolved through simple actions such as taking down bird feeders, taking in pet food, or storing garbage in an area unavailable to bears like a garage. Removing or making attractants unavailable to bears is a critical step in resolving bear/human conflicts. It is equally important for people to be patient. It may take several days for the bear to learn that it is no longer going to be provided with a free meal. In most cases, the bear will simply move on when the food source is no longer present. Installation of an electric fence may be necessary when beeyards and gardens are involved. When camping or hiking, store food items in a vehicle or hoist food packs into the air away from the trunks of trees. If left alone, young bears searching for territory will usually find their way back to a more traditional range. Capture and relocation is a last resort and only warranted if a bear persists in being a nuisance and presents a safety threat to residents or major property damage is likely.

BEAR/HUMAN CONFLICTS

There are no recorded bear attacks on humans in Georgia, and no fatalities. There have only been two documented fatal black bear attacks in the Southeastern United States.

STASH YOUR TRASH TO PREVENT BEAR ENCOUNTERS

Birdseed, Pet Food Also Among Top 3 Non-natural Food Sources for Bears

Add "Bear-proof the garbage" to your spring cleaning list. It's one of the first and most important things you can do to resolve human-bear conflicts.

Easily accessible garbage is irresistible to a hungry black bear. Unfortunately, it's also a major threat to its survival. Bear-proofing your garbage could add years to the lives of some of Georgia's magnificent wild black bears.

"Bears become habituated when people feed them - whether intentional or not," explains Adam Hammond, wildlife biologist with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' Wildlife Resources Division. "When a bear learns that it can get a 'free meal' from garbage, it's going to return again and again until eventually it loses its natural fear of humans. This is how many human-bear conflicts begin and the bear becomes labeled a nuisance."

Homeowners and business owners in known bear areas can help reduce human-bear conflicts by taking these important steps to secure their garbage.

- *Convert to bear-proof garbage containers, or secure garbage inside a garage or other enclosed area.
- *Place garbage cans at the curb on the day of pick-up rather than the night before. If there is no curbside pick-up in the area, take garbage to the nearest disposal site as soon as possible.
- *In some cases, installing an electric fence around garbage storage areas may be useful to prevent bears from accessing household garbage.
- *Remove food scraps from grills and fire pits daily.
- *Rinse food cans and wrappers before disposal. Keep garbage cans clean and deodorize them periodically.
- *Concerning dumpsters, install bear-proof trash bins, attach reinforcing lids or install latch mechanisms.

Garbage is just one of the many non-natural food items that attract bears. Birdseed and pet food round out the top three most common types of attractants. Homeowners in known bear areas are advised to bring pet food indoors and remove birdfeeders during spring and late summer.

In Georgia, there are three population centers for black bears. These include the North Georgia mountains, the Ocmulgee River drainage system in central Georgia and the Okefenokee Swamp in the southeastern part of the state. However, black bears can and do range over larger areas, especially in early spring and late summer when natural food sources are scarce. Young male bears also roam larger areas in an effort to establish their own territory.

"The best and most effective way to resolve human-bear conflicts is to remove the attractant," Hammond says. "In most cases, that simply means making trash, birdseed, pet food and other non-natural food items inaccessible."

The black bear is a symbol of Georgia's natural diversity, the only bear found in the state and a high-priority species in the state's Wildlife Action Plan, a comprehensive conservation strategy. Though now considered the most common bear in North America, the species was nearly eradicated from Georgia by the 1930s due to unregulated market hunting, poaching and large-scale habitat loss. Sound wildlife management practices have restored Georgia's black bears to a thriving population estimated at 5,100 bears statewide.

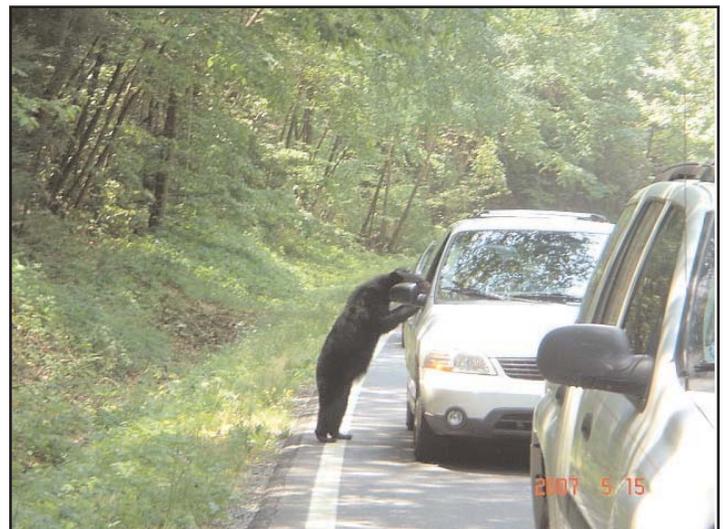
For more information regarding black bears, visit www.georgiawildlife.com/BlackBearFacts, contact a Wildlife Resources Division Game Management office or call 770-918-6416. The public also can visit their local library to check out a copy of an informational DVD entitled, "Where Bears Belong: Black Bears in Georgia."

Black Bear Photos



This bear (seen in photo to the right) clearly connected the link between people and food. Due to its inability to stay away from people and because people continued to feed it, it had to be destroyed.

**Please don't feed bears.
A fed bear is a dead bear.**



Contact Melissa Cummings (melissa.cummings@dnr.state.ga.us or 706-557-3326) with the WRD Communications Office if you need electronic copies of any of the above images.

Black Bear Range Map

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