Coexisting with Black Bears

NCWRC

The largest wild mammal in North Carolina, the black bear awes and fascinates residents with its glossy coat, powerful limbs and barrel-shaped body. The animal also contributes to the state's heritage. Residents have hunted the animal since colonial times, when they relied on its meat for food and its hide for clothes.

Today, with the state's increasing human population, interactions with bears are rising across North Carolina. While sighting a bear from a distance can be entertaining and educational, you can take some simple steps to avoid interactions that might become dangerous.

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Bear Quick Facts

If I call the Wildlife Resources Commission, will someone trap and relocate a bear?
No – that would simply move the problem, rather than solve it, and there are no remote places to move bears where they won't come into contact with people. The long-term solution is to modify your habits to prevent problems or resolve an existing conflict.

Do grizzly bears live in North Carolina?
No. North Carolina has black bears, which are 5-6 feet long and 2-3 feet tall when on all fours. Females usually weigh between 100 and 300 pounds; males can weigh between 200 and 500 pounds. A grizzly bear is larger, more aggressive and lives in the western United States.

What should I do if I see a bear?
Try to stay calm. Bears are usually wary of people unless humans feed or provoke them. Never feed, approach, surround or corner the bear. If it changes its natural behavior because of your presence, you are too close. Back away slowly, making lots of noise.

Where in North Carolina do bears live?
The vast majority of bears live in the mountain and coastal regions of the state. However, black bears occasionally wander into the Piedmont region. While they live in the woods, bears occasionally wander into residential areas or towns in search of food. If left alone and not fed, these wandering bears will eventually leave the area.

Will a black bear attack me?
Probably not. Black bears tend to be shy and non-aggressive toward humans. There has not been an unprovoked bear attack in North Carolina. However, if frequently fed, bears may become dependent on human foods, which may lead to increased interaction with people. Frequent human-bear contact can cause bears to become more bold and visible around humans.

Preventing Problems with Black Bears

To prevent problems with bears, do not unintentally feed them:

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- **Secure bags of trash** inside cans stored in a garage, basement or other secure area.
- **Place trash outside, as late as possible,** on trash pick-up days -- not the night before. Keep all garbage sites clean.
- **If a bear is in the area, remove bird feeders** and hummingbird feeders, even those advertised as "bear proof."
- **Avoid "free-feeding" pets outdoors.** Do not leave pet foods out overnight. If you must feed pets outdoors, make sure all food is consumed and empty bowls are removed.
- **Clean all food and grease from barbecue grill** after each use. Bears are attracted to food odors and may investigate.

If you already have a problem with a bear:

- **Try repellents, but don't rely on them.** There are no repellents that are registered for use on bears. Sprinkling ammonia or other strong disinfectants on garbage can mask the odor of food.
- **Frighten the bear.** Shouting, clapping, blasting a car horn or motion-sensitive lights may scare off a bear temporarily.
- **Leave the bear alone.** Crowds of people can unnerve a bear, causing it to act unpredictably. The crowd should disperse and allow the bear to move on undisturbed.
- **Install electric fencing.** It protects beehives, dumpsters, gardens, compost piles, or other potential food sources.
- **Talk to your neighbors.** Make sure your neighbors and community are aware of ways to prevent bear conflicts.

NORTH CAROLINA Wildlife RESOURCES COMMISSION

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