

# BearFacts

from the Bureau of Wildlife

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## BLACK BEARS FOR NEIGHBORS?

Black bears are more common in New York than most people realize, with the population estimated to be near 4,500. While the largest concentration of bears is in the Adirondack region, substantial populations also exist in the Catskills and in Western New York. In addition, large bear populations exist in the northern counties of Pennsylvania and New Jersey, resulting in bears constantly roaming into southern New York looking to establish new home ranges.

**NEW YORK'S SECOND LARGEST MAMMAL**  
An average adult female weighs 150 pounds. Adult males are considerably larger, averaging 300 pounds, but occasionally tipping the scale at over 600 pounds. Black bears typically range over large areas, with some home ranges covering hundreds of square miles.

Black bears eat both plant and animal foods, but the bulk of their diet is usually plant material. Animal foods would normally consist of ants, grubs, and animals that are already dead. Above all, the black bear is an opportunist and will take advantage of almost any readily available food source.

Your chances of seeing a black bear in the wild are low because of the bear's strong instinct to avoid people. However, not all bears *remain* fearful, and this is not good. Bears that are attracted to unprotected food and garbage become too accustomed to people, which can cause problems all around.

Surprisingly, bears are quite attracted to bird feeders (refer to *Bears and Bird Feeders*). This is not a problem during the winter months because the bears are hibernating. The problem, though, is that many people like to feed birds year round, which can attract bears. Other common attractions include pet food left outside for cats and dogs, livestock food

left unprotected, and grease left on outdoor barbecue grills. Beehives have always been an attraction (just think about Winnie the Pooh), but beekeepers in bear country often use electric fence to keep bears away from their beehives.

### "FOOD" IS THE KEY WORD HERE

Living with bears in bear country is easy if you just keep in mind that the key word is *food*, and food attracts hungry bears. If a bear shows up, promptly remove the food that is attracting it and the bear will probably move on within a day or two. If you insist on leaving something out that is attractive to bears, you must make it physically inaccessible to bears.

### INTENTIONALLY FEEDING BEARS

Problems often arise when people intentionally put food out to attract bears for observation or photography. This can quickly get out of hand, and unforeseen damage can occur, or it can create problems for unsuspecting neighbors.

It is illegal to feed bears within 500 feet of any school, playground, paved public road, designated or established campsite, landfill, dump, or occupied building (not owned and occupied by the person doing the feeding).

If you live in bear country, don't interfere with their natural behavior. Keep them wary; keep them wild.

### RELOCATING PROBLEM BEARS

People often ask, "Why doesn't the DEC trap and remove or relocate these problem bears?" DEC rarely traps and moves bears for several reasons:

In bear country, removing the bear and leaving the attraction is a very short-term solution, as another bear is sure to come along and find it;

The manpower and expense of moving bears would be prohibitive considering the size of New York's bear population;

Research has shown that relocated bears will easily move 50 miles or more back to their original home range; and

Where do you move a nuisance bear that it won't quickly become a nuisance for someone else?



Keep bears wild and enjoy an occasional observation, but remove food attractions when a bear moves into your neighborhood. Why? If a bear gets too used to people, it will not only become a nuisance, but it will also be more likely to live a *very short life*.