

BLACK BEARS



THE GOAL OF SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN NATURAL RESOURCE AGENCIES is to provide an environment where bears can live with minimal interference from humans. Bears become

habituated to human food if they find it often enough. They lose their wildness and become threats to people, property, and themselves.

THE BLACK BEAR (*Ursus americanus*) symbolizes the invaluable wild qualities of the Southern Appalachian Mountains. Its recovery from near extinction in the region to its present thriving population is a result of sound management of bears and bear habitat. Yet, in spite of this protection, bears are dying unnecessarily due to the improper disposal of garbage.

A bear is an opportunist by nature. In the wild it feeds on whatever is readily available. On its way to a ripe berry patch, it may stop to devour a yellowjacket nest or roll over a log to feast on termites and other insects. The bear's remarkable sense of smell also leads it to unnatural foods, such as garbage. This places these animals in immediate danger. Food odors and garbage attract bears to campgrounds, picnic areas, residential neighborhoods, businesses, and dump sites. And while the presence of humans will keep most of them away at first (wild bears are naturally afraid of humans and human scent) ultimately the temptation will draw them in, usually at night.

A night-active bear thus begins a pattern of behavior that usually ends with its death. The animal loses its fear of humans as it

begins to associate human scent with the reward of food. Such a bear will soon become day-active in developed areas, putting it at still greater risk. It may be accidentally killed by a car or may have to be trapped and relocated. It may ingest toxic material from garbage and die. Or it may become an easy target for poachers who will shoot a bear for its gall bladder, a valuable commodity on the Asian folk medicine market.

State and federal agencies have gone to considerable effort and expense to keep human-related food away from bears. Many trash cans in picnic areas and campgrounds have bear-proof lids and several bear-proof dumpsters have been installed. Regulations prohibiting the feeding of bears are strictly enforced.

Unfortunately, people do not always store trash properly. Food is sometimes left unattended at campsites or cabins. Partially burned trash in fire rings and scraps of uneaten food are left behind. Even bird feed or pet food left outdoors can start problems. Some of these things may seem insignificant, but they initiate behavior patterns which often cannot be reversed.

In essence, feeding bears kills bears.

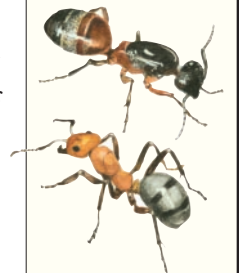
A bear's natural diet consists of:



Berries and acorns
59%



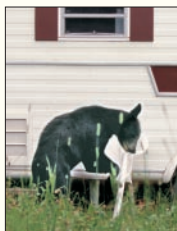
Grasses and forbs
28%



Insects and meat
13%



Habituated bears eventually cause property damage.



Food scraps can draw bears to developed areas.

PLEASE DO YOUR PART

BY FOLLOWING THE PROCEDURES THAT APPLY TO YOU.



Please do not stuff garbage cans to overflowing or place garbage outside of cans.

Public cooperation is essential if the Southern Appalachians are to maintain a healthy population of wild black bears in the years to come.

AT RENTAL CABINS, CHALETS, MOTELS, OR RESIDENTIAL AREAS:

- Never leave unattended food, pet food, or garbage outside.
- Do not feed birds between April and November unless you use feeders that bears cannot reach and that have spill pans to prevent seeds from reaching the ground.
- Clean cooking grills immediately after use.
- Bear-proof bee hives, compost piles, and gardens with electric or chain-link fence.
- Do not leave food as bait for any animal or leave food scraps on the ground.
- If a bear approaches, move your family and any food indoors immediately.

IN THE BACKCOUNTRY:

- Hang food and anything with strong odors (toothpaste, bug repellent, soap, etc.) at least 10 feet off the ground and 4 feet from a tree or limb.
- Do not cook or store food in or near your tent (food odors on tent or gear may attract a bear).
- If a bear approaches, frighten it by yelling, banging pans together, or throwing rocks.
- Do respect bears and admire them from a distance.
- Pack out trash – don't bury it or burn it.
- Do not throw food scraps, foil, cans, or glass into fire rings.

Many state and federal agencies have laws or regulations that make feeding a bear unlawful. Store your food properly.

"GARBAGE" BEAR LIFE SPAN



WILD BEAR LIFE SPAN



WILD BEARS

≠
do not associate with
developed areas
≠
depend on natural foods
≠
are afraid of humans
and
human-related smells
≠
live longer

GARBAGE BEARS

≠
frequent developed areas
≠
become dependent on
human-related food
and garbage
≠
cause property
damage and injure
people
≠
are likely to be
killed by poachers or
hit by vehicles
≠
cost taxpayers money

*Wild bears live
23% longer than
"garbage" bears.*

*If you have further
questions about bears
or wish to report a
bear problem, please
contact your local
state wildlife agency.*
• Tennessee Wildlife
Resources Agency
Region III
800-262-6704
(Crossville) or
Region IV
800-332-0900
(Morristown)

**IN CAMPGROUNDS AND
PICNIC AREAS:**

- Keep a clean site by properly disposing of:
 - » All garbage, including fruit rinds and cores.
 - » Aluminum foil (even from grills) that has been used to cook or store food.
 - » Plastic wrap and bags that have stored food.
 - » Cans and jars that are empty.
- Pick up food scraps around your site.
- Do not burn food scraps or garbage in the grill.
- Never leave food or coolers unattended (unless inside a vehicle or hard-sided camper).
- Wipe down table tops before vacating your site.
- If a bear approaches your site, pack up your food and trash. If necessary, attempt to scare the animal away with loud shouts, by banging pans together, or even throwing rocks and sticks at it. If the bear is persistent, move away slowly to your vehicle or another secure area.

ANY TIME YOU SEE A BEAR:

- Do not feed or toss food to a bear or any wild animal.
- Keep children close at hand.
- Keep pets indoors or in a vehicle or camper.
- Do not approach a bear – they are dangerous. If it changes its natural behavior (feeding, foraging, or movement) because of your presence, you are too close.
- Never surround or corner a bear.
- Never run from a bear – back slowly away and make lots of noise.
- Encourage others to follow these instructions.
- Be responsible. Improper behavior on your part may cause the bear to die.
- In the extreme case that you are attacked by a black bear, try to fight back using any object available. Act aggressively and intimidate the bear by yelling and waving your arms. Playing dead is not appropriate.

**WILDLIFE BIOLOGISTS ARE CONSTANTLY SEEKING BETTER WAYS TO
MANAGE THE SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN BEAR POPULATION.**

LESSONS LEARNED

Bears habituated to humans and human-related food are a chronic problem in many areas in the Southern Appalachians, especially in heavily used recreation areas. Over the years they have caused many thousands of dollars in property damage and have injured dozens of visitors. And yet the biggest victims of conflicts between bears and humans have been the bears themselves.

Wildlife biologists have tried a variety of strategies to deal with habituated bears. In the old days, rangers carried shotguns loaded with bird shot to frighten habituated bears without causing permanent injury. A more recent management practice, however, has been trapping and relocating.

Bears who frequent developed areas in search of garbage and other human-related food were commonly captured by biologists in culvert-style traps. Generally, the bears were transported from the developed areas, tranquilized and “worked-up.” Work-ups involved gathering valuable information about the bear by weighing and measuring it, pulling a small, non-essential tooth for aging, then marking the bear with an ear tag and lip tattoo. Lastly, the bear was released in suitable habitat many miles from its home territory.

For years the shortcomings of relocation as a management tool have been known. Although some bears did successfully adapt to their new surroundings and revert to eating

wild foods, many did not. Many used their amazing sense of smell and homing ability to return to the developed area, since finding and obtaining human-related food generally uses

less energy than foraging for wild foods. Others were killed by automobiles while traveling long distances in unfamiliar terrain. Some were killed by hunters, poachers, or other bears. Relocation has become an alternative to be used as a last resort.

In recent years, wildlife agencies have adopted more innovative bear management strategies that emphasize **prevention rather than relocation**. More attention

is given to keeping picnic areas and campgrounds completely free of food scraps or garbage, especially at night. Public education and cooperation are priorities. As a last resort, day-active “garbage” bears are trapped and released nearby, rather than being relocated.

The rationale for on-site work-ups and releases is that the handling by humans will be a negative, long-remembered experience for the bear that will teach it to avoid the developed area in the future. In essence, biologists suspect that the bear will associate the developed area with bad memories.

So far the new efforts appear to be successful when the technique is utilized consistently. The number of bears requiring relocation or euthanasia has been decreased significantly.



Teaching the public how to properly handle food in bear country has become a management priority.



Bear cubs who eat only wild food have the best chance for survival.

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