

Be Bear Aware

News Release Date

04-04-2023

A black bear sighting was reported in a residential neighborhood of Belle Mead this week. While uncommon in Montgomery, they are not unheard of in our area of Central New Jersey, and while there is no cause for alarm, caution is advised. In the spring, young bears sometimes wander, seeking new territories and food sources along rivers and other connected open space areas.

Black bears by nature tend to be wary of people. Just as bears would normally avoid people in a natural setting, people should always avoid and not disturb or attract bears.

The most common bear problem New Jersey's residents experience is black bears getting into their garbage. Bears have a strong sense of smell and are attracted to neighborhoods by garbage odors, so properly securing your garbage is one of the best ways to prevent bears from becoming a nuisance.

Black bears are most active shortly before sunrise and again after sunset. However, they can be active during the day and may be active throughout the night. If you should encounter a black bear in your neighborhood or outdoors while hiking or camping, follow these common-sense safety tips:

- Do not feed bears!
- Never feed or approach a bear!
- Remain calm if you encounter a bear. Do not run from it; running may trigger a chase response.
- If you encounter a bear that is feeding, do not approach it and slowly back away. A bear on a food source will aggressively defend it.
- From a safe distance, make the bear aware of your presence by speaking in an assertive voice, singing, clapping your hands, or making other noises.
- Make sure the bear has an escape route.
- If a bear enters your home or garage, provide it with an escape route by propping all doors open.
- Avoid direct eye contact, which may be perceived by a bear as a challenge. Never run from a bear. Instead, slowly back away.

- To scare the bear away, make loud noises by yelling, banging pots and pans or using an airhorn. Make yourself look as big as possible by waving your arms. If you are with someone else, stand close together with your arms raised above your head.
- The bear may utter a series of huffs, make popping jaw sounds by snapping its jaws and swat the ground. These are warning signs that you are too close. Slowly back away, avoid direct eye contact and do not run.
- If a bear stands on its hind legs or moves closer, it may be trying to get a better view or detect scents in the air. It is usually not a threatening behavior.
- Black bears will sometimes "bluff charge" when cornered, threatened or attempting to steal food. Stand your ground, avoid direct eye contact, then slowly back away and do not run.
- Pairs or groups of people should stay together and perform these actions as a unit when they encounter a bear; do not separate and do not move in different directions.
- If the bear does not leave, move to a secure area.
- Report black bear damage or nuisance behavior to the DEP's 24-hour, toll-free hotline at 1-877-WARN DEP (1-877-927-6337).
- Families who live in areas frequented by black bears should have a "Bear Plan" in place for children, with an escape route and planned use of whistles and air horns.
- Black bear attacks are extremely rare. If a black bear does attack, fight back! Aim for the snout and/or eyes. Use anything at hand: (knife, sticks, rocks, binoculars, backpack or kick the bear.) Immediately notify local police (9-1-1) and NJ's Division of Fish & Wildlife at 1-877-WARN-DEP (24 hr., toll-free).

Further Bear Resources from NJDEP