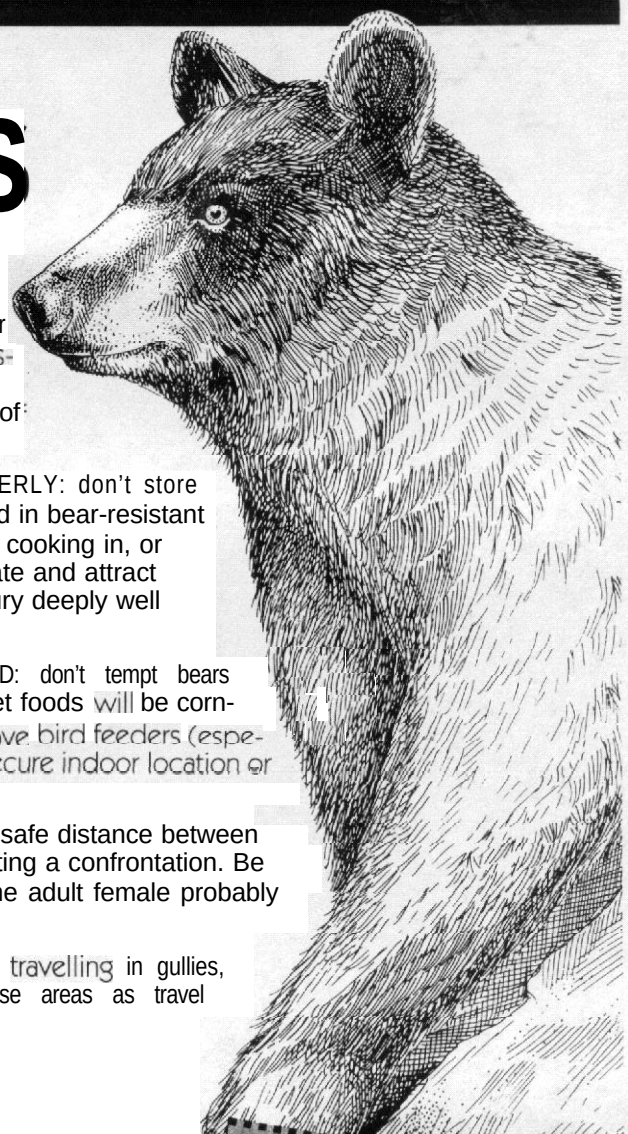
University of Massachusetts Cooperative Extension System

CO-EXISTING WITH

BLACK BEARS

IN MASSACHUSETTS



- DO NOT FEED BEARS: feeding bears may place you or your family, friends, and neighbors in danger because bears accustomed to handouts lose their instinctive fear of humans and become unpredictable. You also place the animal in danger of having to be destroyed.
- WHEN **CAMPING, STORE** ALL FOODS AND WASTES PROPERLY: don't store food in your tent, trailer, or other inhabited space; secure food in bear-resistant containers or hang it high between two trees or poles. Avoid cooking in, or immediately near, your tent where food odors may accumulate and attract bears. Dispose of all waste in bear-resistant dumpsters or bury deeply well away from the campsite.
- REMOVE OR SECURE **ALL** POTENTIAL SOURCES OF FOOD: don't tempt bears by leaving or providing food within easy reach. Be sure all pet foods will be completely consumed at a feeding and not left in the dish. Remove bird feeders (especially those with suet) by early April. Store all garbage in a secure indoor location or in a bear-resistant receptacle.
- DO NOT APPROACH ANY BEAR IN THE WILD: maintain a safe distance between yourself and any wild animal to avoid threatening it or instigating a confrontation. Be particularly aware of seemingly abandoned young cubs -- the adult female probably is nearby.
- BE ALERT IN AREAS WHERE BEARS **MAY** BE **ACTIVE:** avoid travelling in gullies, along hedgerows, or in thick cover -- bears frequently use these areas as travel corridors.

BASIC LIFE HISTORY OF BLACK BEARS

The black bear is a large bodied (male: 150 to 300 lb; female: 100 to 180 lb.), dark brown to black mammal. All black bears are characterized by a light brown muzzle; some individuals may have a white patch on the chest. They have small, conspicuously furred ears that usually are held erect. They have large, well-padded feet equipped with 5 prominent claws. Bears have good eyesight and hearing, but rely primarily on their excellent sense of smell to locate food and recognize potential danger.

In Massachusetts, bears are found primarily west of the Connecticut River and north of the Massachusetts Turnpike. However, individuals, particularly young males, have been recorded as far east as Worcester and Middlesex Counties and south to the Connecticut/Rhode Island borders. They typically inhabit wooded wetlands, swamps, and mixed hardwood and conifer forests with a dense understory adjacent to water sources.

Black bears are active during daylight (1/2 hr. before sunrise to 1 to 2 hr. after sunset. They may be nocturnal in areas where frequent contact with humans occurs (e.g., in campgrounds, dumps or landfills) or during the breeding season. They are not social animals and rarely group together (except at food sources during extremely lean natural food years). They have a relatively low productivity in that they produce 2 to 4 cubs every 2 to 3 years. Females first breed at 3 to 5 years of age. Onset of denning is variable, depending on availability of natural foods, but generally occurs between late November and early December and extends until early April.

FACTS ABOUT BLACK BEARS

- Bears normally retreat before you even realize that they are there.
- They climb trees with great agility and speed.
- They can attain and maintain a speed of 25 to 30 mph over short distances.
- They are intelligent, have good long-term memory, and are capable of recalling the location of plentiful, but periodic, food sources several years after their first visit.

For Additional Information About Black Bears, Their Management, And Damage Control Strategies, Contact :

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