

# Bears in Central North Carolina

## ▼ Why are bears showing up in our neighborhoods and cities?

It is increasingly common for residents throughout North Carolina to encounter black bears, especially during the months of May through July. These bears are typically juveniles (1 to 2 yrs. old) that no longer depend on the adult female and are searching for new homes. These young bears are called transient bears and their dispersal is perfectly natural. While the bears appear to be wandering aimlessly into places people think bears do not belong, they are not necessarily lost. Most are simply exploring their opportunities. Black bears have been dispersing through central North Carolina for decades. Transient bear sightings have increased because our bear population is expanding into central North Carolina.

## ▼ Are these cubs orphaned by the adult female?

These juvenile bears may look small, and many will refer to them as cubs, but they are not cubs. One to two year old bears are supposed to be living on their own at this age.

## ▼ Are black bears dangerous?

Black bears, by nature, are not aggressive animals. They peacefully coexist in close proximity to humans year-round throughout North Carolina. The presence of bears in these new areas should not be immediately viewed as cause for alarm or fear.

## ▼ Do we need to help the bear find its way out of the urban area?

Typically these early summer visitors to our towns and cities will only stay around for a brief period of time. During their stay they may be seen by many different people and sometimes find themselves in strange places. These visits often occur in areas close to wildlife travel corridors such as river basins and creeks. Many of North Carolina's cities are located on these same corridors. At night, when human activity is low and vehicle traffic is light, a bear may find itself traveling into the middle of an urban area. The bear quickly learns that this area is not going to be suitable as long-term habitat. Given time and patience the bear will find its way back to more rural and appropriate bear habitat.

## ▼ Are transient bears different from those in other areas of the state?

Transient bears are different from bears that routinely live around humans within established black bear **range**. Most bears with established home ranges generally stay within those areas. Thus, residents can prevent negative interactions, such as damage to bird feeders, getting into pet food and garbage cans, by following simple practices essential to living near bears. Transient bears, as the term implies, are often here today and gone tomorrow. They do not stay in any one area very long. Likewise, it is very difficult to predict where they will be from one day to the next.

## ▼ What will NC Wildlife Resources Commission do to help the bear?

When a transient bear has been discovered in an area, local authorities usually report the situation to the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. Commission biologists assess the situation and gather information to determine if the bear poses a threat to public safety or property or if the bear is significantly threatened. In almost all cases the Commission has encountered, the best approach is to allow the bear to leave on its own.

The following recommendations provide the best and most efficient course of action to help the bear safely return to more suitable areas:

1. Don't Panic. If you are one of the lucky people to have encountered the bear, observe it at a safe distance and appreciate the opportunity to see one of North Carolina's largest native mammals. It will not be in the area for very

long!

2. Never chase or corner the bear!
3. Authorities should make every effort to limit human traffic and disturbances in the area.
4. If it is daytime and the bear is treed, it likely will not feel safe enough to come down until sometime after sunset. Black bears climb trees all the time and when threatened a tree serves as a safe haven.
5. Local authorities or residents should not attempt to keep the bear in the area and you should never attempt to harass the bear in these situations.
6. Under no circumstances should humans approach or try to feed the bear or surround it.
7. If, after one night without human disturbances the bear does not leave the tree, is injured or if the safety of the bear or people becomes an issue, then capture of the bear becomes an option.

Black Bears are doing quite well in North Carolina. As the bear populations continue to expand into more and more areas, it is ultimately human attitudes toward bears that will determine whether bears will continue to exist in the state. Unfortunately, bears are often viewed either as dangerous animals or cuddly pets. It is best to avoid these extreme views and instead show a healthy respect for this magnificent animal. Appreciate that North Carolina is blessed with a healthy and vibrant wildlife population including black bears and work hard to learn to live with our wildlife. It is after all another one of those things that makes North Carolina a great place to live!

