

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation



Division of Fish, Wildlife & Marine Resources

Bureau of Wildlife, Region 3

21 South Putt Corners Road, New Paltz, New York 12561

Phone: (845) 256-3098 · FAX: (845) 255-4659

Website: www.dec.state.ny.us

BEARS AND BIRD FEEDERS

Although many people find it difficult to believe, an animal as large and powerful as a black bear is readily attracted to bird feeders as a source of food. Black bears are, for the most part vegetarians, and bird seed, even in minute quantities, is a highly desirable food for them. In many cases, it is the food of choice and will be sought out over other natural foods. Bear nuisance complaint records from the Region 3 DEC Office in New Paltz reveal that at certain times of the year, bird feeders are involved in over 80% of the bear problems. First and foremost, bears are readily attracted to back yards because of the presence of bird feeders. The problem often escalates to other food sources such as garbage cans, barbeque grills and compost piles as bears become bolder and more acclimated to people. Such activities are not in the best interest of either the bears or the homeowners. Bears that learn to approach one house will approach other houses and invariably this results in concern from non-suspecting people.

What to do??? It is important to break the pattern of black bears coming to houses for food. Fortunately, most bird feeding activities occur during winter when bears are in their dens. When bears emerge their dens in March, natural foods are not abundant and bird feeders represent a readily abundant food source. It is highly recommended that bird feeding activities cease at that time if you live in bear country. It is also important to remember that residual seed remaining on the ground will also be attractive to the bears. It should either be removed or treated with a covering scent such as ammonia. Some people start feeding again during early summer and closely monitor their feeders. If any bears return, they immediately cease their operation.



Many people feel they can outsmart the bears by taking their feeders in at night. This may offer some relief, however, there is usually enough residual feed from daytime feeding to continue to attract bears. Others attempt to place the feeder high and out of reach of the bear. A bear's sense of smell is so great that the feeder will continue to attract the bear and will not discourage the bear from spending considerable time trying to figure out how to reach it. Some people have had success by mixing cayenne pepper with the bird seed to make it less palatable. This practice has some value with individual bears who will learn to avoid specific feeders, however, in bear country, every bear that finds the feeder will have to knock it down to learn that it contains pepper and is not a good feeding station. Removal of the attraction is the only long term solution.

Some homeowners receive great satisfaction from their bird feeding activities and are reluctant to stop feeding. Keep in mind that any feed placed out for wildlife is not species specific...it is impossible to pick and choose which animals will be attracted and which animals will not. The choice is up to the individual; however, any activity which results in attracting black bears close to homes should be carefully considered. The resulting presence of bears affects their neighbors and, in the long run, does more harm to the bears than good. Bears that become accustomed to houses and people become chronic nuisances, suffer diet deficiencies from continued improper foods and often end up hit by cars or shot illegally by people who misunderstand their intentions.

As is the case with almost all bear-human conflicts; if you take away the food, you will take away the bear. A simple saying also applies..."**A fed bear is a dead bear**".

Want more information on black bears? If you have access to the Internet, go to the DEC Web Page for Black Bear information at:

www.dec.state.ny.us/website/dfwmr/wildlife/wildgame/bear.htm or go to the web site of the North American Bear Center at www.bear.org and you'll find information on black bears, human safety, living with bears, what to do if you see a bear and bear life history.