

WHAT TO DO IF YOU SEE A BEAR AT WEST POINT

The recent outbreak of black bear sightings at West Point is causing concern for residents and personnel who are worried about pets, children, adults, and personal property. I hope I can alleviate those concerns.

Black bears are the only bear species found in New York or east of the Mississippi River. They are a non-aggressive species, preferring to avoid humans if it all possible. The average black bear only weighs about 200-250 pounds. A black bear stands three feet high at the shoulder when on all fours and five-and-a half feet tall on those **RARE** occasions when it stands up on its hind legs.

The bears that are most often seen at West Point are mostly two-year-old males that have been run off by their mothers before the breeding season starts (bears mate during June). The young males head off to establish new territories of their own, traveling up to 30 miles in a day. The problem is that bears have large home ranges (males: 25-60 square miles - females: 6-20 square miles). So, the young males often have to travel many miles before finding an unoccupied area. All of this traveling increases the likelihood of a bear encountering human civilization.

The problem with these encounters is that humans unknowingly leave handy food sources for the young black bears to find. These include garbage cans, barbecue grills, bird feeders, and unattended pet food. The young bears, tired and hungry, take advantage of these easy food sources and will remain near the food until it is gone. Having a bear in the neighborhood can certainly make people nervous. The one positive point is that the young males will have found a new territory away from humans generally by the end of July.

So, what can West Point residents do to discourage bear/ human encounters?

First, keep bird feeders empty April through July (most birds do not require additional food at this time, as there is plenty of wild food available). The biggest problem caused by bears in southeastern NY and New Jersey is bears raiding bird feeders and eating the birdseed.

Second, keep the lids of all garbage bins and cans closed. Keep garbage cans in the garage until pick-up day. Spray garbage cans lightly with ammonia (bears hate the smell, as do raccoons, skunks, and opossums).

If you feed your pets outside, do not leave the food outside overnight.

Finally, do not put out food to attract bears. It is a violation of New York laws to feed bears and your neighbors may not appreciate it. And, it encourages bears to not be afraid of people, which can lead to more serious problems

If you should see a bear, what should you do? First, remain calm and enjoy the sight. Do not approach the bear or attempt to touch or feed it. Report all sightings to the Natural Resources Branch at 938-3857 or email at yj6936@exmail.usma.army.mil. If the bear is trapped, cornered, or up a tree, you should call the MP desk (938-3333), which will notify the appropriate agency personnel to come and remove the bear.

For more information on black bears, call the USMA Wildlife Biologist at 938-3857 or email at yj6936@exmail.usma.army.mil.