

TOP

MDC Encourages Public to ‘Be Bear Aware’ this Summer

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MDC’s ongoing bear research indicates Missouri is home to around 800 black bears, and that population is growing by 8% each year.

The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) is reminding southeast Missouri residents to “Be Bear Aware,” with now being prime time for seeing young male black bears on the move.

MDC Southeast Regional Administrator Matt Bowyer said only one species can be found in this state — the American black bear — though multiple color phases can be found in Missouri other than black, such that a bear’s fur can be brown, red, or cinnamon in color.

“Young bears begin to wander seeking food and new areas to settle,” said Bowyer. “This time of year we are likely to see a bear, or two, as young males naturally wander in search of a new place to call home.”

Bear population is expanding, both in total numbers and range, he said, which might explain the uptick in sightings in recent years. MDC’s ongoing bear research indicates the Show-Me-State is currently home to around 800 black bears, and that population is growing by 8% each year.

“These creatures are part of our state’s natural history, and many people enjoy the thought of seeing one of these impressive animals,” said Bowyer. “But with an

expanding population of bears, however, comes an increased potential of human-bear interactions.”

And, he noted, while generally not aggressive, black bears are driven to find food, and they can become accustomed to obtaining food from humans.

MDC suggests the following tips to avoid issues if a bear has been sighted in the area:

Store garbage, recyclables, and compost inside a secure building or in a bear-proof container or location.

Regularly clean and disinfect trash containers to minimize smells that could attract bears.

Keep grills and smokers clean and store them inside.

Don't leave pet food outside. Feed pets a portion at each meal and remove the empty containers.

Refrain from using bird feeders in bear country from April through November. If in use, hang them at least 10 feet high and 4 feet away from any structure. Keep in mind that even if a bear cannot get to the birdseed, the scent could still attract it to the area.

Use electric fencing to keep bears away from beehives, chicken coops, vegetable gardens, orchards, and other potential food sources.

For more on black bears in Missouri, go to mdc.mo.gov/bearaware. Report bear sightings and submit photos online at mdc.mo.gov/reportbears.

In addition to directly educating Missourians on how to Be Bear Aware about black bears in the state, MDC is also affiliated with the BearWise® program. BearWise is a multi-state education effort developed by black bear biologists and supported by state wildlife agencies, such as MDC, that provides sound information and smart solutions that help people, neighborhoods, and communities prevent problems with black bears and keep bears wild. BearWise shares ways to prevent conflicts, provides resources to resolve problems, and encourages community initiatives to keep bears wild. Learn more at BearWise.org.

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