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Black Bear Travels Nearly 400 Miles Across Southern Missouri

JULY 08TH 2016 BY DEE LOFLIN

Black Bear Travels Nearly 400 Miles Across Southern Missouri

Traveling black bear is a reminder to be “Bear Aware.”

Whitewater, Missouri - A three-year-old black bear sighted in Whitewater Friday morning is a reminder to southeast Missourians to be “Bear Aware” according to the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC). Whitewater resident Phillip O’Kelly saw the bear with his daughter on their front porch, but when the bear heard humans, it took off, he said.

“It was probably about 100 feet from the porch,” O’Kelly said. “I came out to look at it and as soon as it heard our commotion it turned around to run off.”

O’Kelly said his property is surrounded by woods and is a place where his family enjoys seeing wildlife of all kinds.

“He wasn’t aggressive, was just looking around and he definitely wasn’t hurting anything,” O’Kelly said. “I hope people just let him be.”

O’Kelly noticed the bear was wearing a collar and ear tag, so the family contacted the MDC’s Southeast Regional Office to report the sighting.

“I’ve been tracking this bear and watched it trek about 400 miles across the southern part

of the state,” said Jeff Beringer, MDC resource scientist who leads the Missouri Black Bear Project.

Beringer’s research confirms multiple bear sighting reports made to Bollinger County Conservation Agent Jeff Scott this week, were all related to the same bear as he traveled through the area.

The Missouri Black Bear Project has entered its second phase. First, biologists trapped and radio-collared bears across southern Missouri. This helped them to estimate how many bears are in the state. Now the biologists are measuring survival and reproductive rates of female bears as well as keeping track of survival of first-year cubs.

“This bear probably left Christian county because his mother ran him off and because young male bears have an instinct to move and find unrelated females,” Beringer explained. “Not all bears move this far, but long dispersals are common for male bears.”

Beringer said the bear sighted in Whitewater was originally captured when it was 18-months-old in Christian county, where it wintered. Sometime the following year, the bear traveled to Warren County where he dened.

“This spring, a landowner took pictures of him and sent them to me and I noted the collar and knew he was a long way from home,” Beringer said, adding that studying the animal’s movements gives MDC an opportunity to see how bears use corridors and other physical barriers like roads and rivers. Beringer said the bear was recaptured and given a new collar in May and has since traveled on its own to southeast Missouri.

“He’s probably looking for a female and I expect he will settle down somewhere this summer, since he’s three-years-old now,” Beringer said.

Beringer said this bear sighting is a good reminder for Missourians to be “Bear Aware” by making efforts to keep bears wild. Residents should ensure bird feeders are put away, trash is kept out of reach and any pet food is stored inside at night.

“A fed bear is a dead bear,” Beringer said. “Bears are creatures of habit, so if they find they can get a free meal somewhere, they’re likely to stick around and that’s when they get into trouble.”

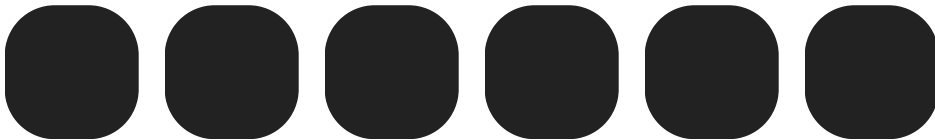
O’Kelly said although he enjoyed seeing the bear, his property doesn’t have things sitting out that might make the bear stay.

“It’s neat to see a bear in real life, instead of on television,” O’Kelly said. “He was a cute bear to look at, but we hope people let him be and he can travel on and stay out of trouble.”

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