

## News from the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department

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### Be Responsible in Bear Country -- Take down Birdfeeders Earlier this Spring

**CONCORD, N.H.** – Despite a recent March Nor'easter, bears are becoming active in many areas of the state. Officials are asking the New Hampshire public to be responsible and remove bird feeders and secure other backyard attractants. Although March 31 is the traditional deadline for ending winter bird feeding activity, more mild winters and the earlier arrival of spring conditions warrant modifications.



"Den emergence by bears appears to be a couple of weeks earlier this year and the upcoming stretch of mild spring weather will cause bears to become active," said Andrew Timmins, Bear Project Leader for the NH Fish and Game Department. "The strong spring sunshine, longer days and warmer temperatures stimulate many wildlife species, including hungry bears. As bears start to get active, let it serve as a reminder that it is time to put the birdfeeders away until next fall."

Reports of bear activity and sightings have become more frequent in recent days and many people are reporting seeing bears at their birdfeeders, according to Timmins. "By taking action now, you can prevent attracting a bear to your home. Do not wait for a bear to get the birdfeeder and then respond. Doing so encourages foraging behavior by bears near residences. A single food reward will cause the bear to return and continue to search the area for food. Averting conflicts with bears requires increased responsibility and proactive behavior by the public. Feeding birds during the summer is a hobby that puts bears at significant risk."

Bear-human conflict mitigation is far more successful when people are pre-emptive, Timmins explains. Black oil sunflower seeds are simply too high a quality of food (high

in fat and protein) for bears to ignore. Natural bear foods during spring and summer are generally high in carbohydrates and low in protein and fat. As a result, it does not make sense, from the standpoint of energy, for a bear to ignore sunflower seeds.

Despite continued pleas asking homeowners not to feed birds during spring and summer, birdfeeders were the direct cause of 25% of bear-human conflicts during 2016. In addition to birdfeeders, other attractants that contributed significantly to conflicts during that year included unprotected chickens/poultry (23%) and unsecured garbage cans/dumpsters (38%). "If the public would be willing to address these three common attractants, we could immediately reduce annual bear-human conflicts by 86%, which would be tremendous," said Timmins.

Homeowners should take action to reduce the chances of a bear visiting their home. Avoid encounters with bears by taking a few simple precautions:

- Stop all bird feeding by April 1 or at the onset of extended spring-like weather conditions.
- Clean up any spilled birdseed and dispose of it in the trash.
- Secure all garbage in airtight containers inside a garage or adequate storage area, and put garbage out on the morning of pickup, not the night before. If using a dumpster, inform your dumpster company that you need a dumpster with metal locking tops and doors that are inaccessible to bears and other wildlife.
- Avoid putting meat or other food scraps in your compost pile.
- Don't leave pet food dishes outside overnight.
- Clean and store outdoor grills after each use.
- Finally, never feed bears!

These steps will help to ensure that your backyard does not become attractive to bears and other wildlife, which is important because it prevents property damage by bears and because it keeps bears from becoming nuisance animals. For more information on preventing conflicts with black bears, visit [www.wildnh.com/wildlife/somethings-bruin.html](http://www.wildnh.com/wildlife/somethings-bruin.html).

**If you have questions about bear-related problems, you can get advice by calling a toll-free number coordinated jointly by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services and the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department: 1-888-749-2327 (1-888-SHY-BEAR).**