

There's a bear in my yard! What do I do?

A bear in the city? Sounds strange, but with Niceville surrounded by Eglin Reservation, although rare, it is possible for a bear to be seen in our area.

Black bears are the only bears native to Florida. They are usually black with a brown muzzle and may have a white "blaze" marking on their chest. Adult bears range in size from 150 to 400 lbs. The Florida breeding season runs from May to August and cubs are born seven months later. Bears are omnivores, with 80% of their diet plant material, and 20% to include insects and meat.

At about 1.5 years of age, sub adult male bears are shunned by their mothers, forcing them to find their own home range and food sources. In their attempts to find their own "turf", many wander into urban areas.

Another reason bears may wander into urban areas is because of intentional and unintentional feeding. Intentional feeding of bears should not be tolerated. Unintentional feeding includes bird, squirrel and other wildlife feeders, garbage cans, pet food bowls, compost piles, beehives, and fruit and/or nut bearing trees and shrubs. The general rule of thumb: anything that attracts dogs, cats, or raccoons will also attract bears!

How to avoid attracting bears

- Store pet food inside and feed pets inside
- Store garbage cans in the garage. Set them out the morning of pick-up – not overnight.
- Remove or relocate bird or squirrel feeders that contain grain, corn or suet blocks.
- When feeding birds, put out smaller amounts of feed or vary the feeding schedule to reduce attracting hungry bears.

What to do if you see a bear

- Do NOT run from the bear
- Do not feed the bear
- Never approach the bear. But do talk, whistle, clap, or make some other type of noise to alert the bear of your presence.
- Make sure the bear has an escape route.
- Remove any attractants.

If you have a bear in your area that is a nuisance, please contact the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWWCC)'s Northwest Regional Office at (850) 265-3676.

Information for this article was compiled from two brochures published by the FFWCC, and are available at the dispatch window in the Niceville Police Department.