

Information About Bears at Laurel Park:



It is that time of year again when we are graced by the presence of our friend the Black Bear in Laurel Park. In general, most bears in Massachusetts enter winter dens at some point, and bears are usually denned from about mid-December through February. Laurel Park is located close to conservation property and is definitely an area where Black Bears and their cubs will frequently be sighted in the Springtime.

Black Bear attacks on people are extremely rare, but bears are wild animals and should always be treated respectfully, and considered unpredictable and potentially dangerous. Each year the Northampton Police Department fields a number of calls regarding bears that have been hit by cars, entered a porch or garage, or damaged property. So, what is the best way for us to interact with bears, so that we can both enjoy the beautiful wooded landscape in which we live?

BASIC BEAR SAFETY RULES:

- ❖ *Laurel Park By-Laws specifically state that "Feeding of birds, squirrels, and chipmunks is not accepted from April 1st through October 31st, in order to lessen the presence of wildlife predators. This is a safety concern and Laurel Park complies with City of Northampton Article III, section B. Feeding of Wildlife Prohibited."*

- ❖ **Feeders:** Stop feeding birds, hummingbirds, squirrels, chipmunks and any other wildlife, and take down all feeders by April 1st, or any time before that date if Black Bears are seen in the area.
- ❖ **Compost:** Use Bear-Proof Compost Bins, and do not add meats or sweets to the compost pile. In general, bears are attracted to compost with kitchen scraps, vegetables and fruit in it.
- ❖ **Storage:** Do not store any food or garbage outdoors.
- ❖ **Pet Food:** Do not leave any Pet Food outside.
- ❖ **Trash Dumpster:** Always close the doors on Laurel Park's main Trash Dumpster (and be attentive when you approach the dumpster, as bears have been sighted inside it in the past).
- ❖ **Grills:** Clean Outdoor Grills off after every use.
- ❖ Do not feed bears or encourage interaction with them.
- ❖ Consider placing a bell on your dog's collar, and make sure that your dog is always leashed and under the control of a person, when walking or outside.
- ❖ Make noise when you are out walking (talk, whistle, carry a bell – anything that will pre-alert bears to your approach) and give the bears time to react to your approach and move out of the area.



WHAT TO DO IF YOU ENCOUNTER A BEAR:

- ❖ **Enjoy the Sighting:** If you are in a safe space such as your home, just stay inside and enjoy the amazing sight of a bear visiting. Make sure to check around your home afterward to remove any sources of food that could be attracting a bear.
- ❖ **Alert the Bear:** If you see a bear while outside, give it plenty of room and make some noise to alert the bear of your presence, giving it ample time and space to turn and leave. Do not approach the bear, in order to avoid being perceived as a threat.
- ❖ **Slowly Back Away:** If you have a close encounter with a bear, continue facing the bear and slowly back away. Wild bears seldom attack people. Slowly backing away defuses the situation and gives the bear room to flee.
- ❖ **Remain Calm:** While backing away, stay calm and talk to the bear to help it keep track of your retreat. Avoid sudden movements and do not turn, or run, or attempt to climb a tree. Running could elicit a chase response, and climbing a tree could be interpreted as a threat to cubs, since cubs will often climb trees when startled.
- ❖ **Bears with Cubs:** A Black Bear with cubs may present greater danger to people, if those people are perceived by the mother as a threat to the cubs. A mother will often send her cubs up a tree, if there is any indication of perceived threat. Be aware that your interest in the cubs may be the threat.
- ❖ **Pay Attention:** Bears will use their senses to figure out what you are. A bear that stands up is usually curious and not threatening, and may be trying to get your scent or see you better. If a bear approaches you, face the bear, wave your arms wildly, and shout while continuing to back away. The idea is to intimidate the bear into retreating.
- ❖ **Surprising a Bear:** If suddenly surprised, some bears may feel threatened and give warning signs that they are uncomfortable. They may clack their jaws together or sway their head – those are signs for you to back away and leave. If a bear charges at you, wave your arms wildly and shout at it.