

Life of a Black Bear

Bill Banaszewski

The black bear is often thought of as aggressive and menacing, but it is actually a very shy and secretive creature. They live in wooded areas, and have a very large home range. Males travel up to 100 square miles, and females travel 25 to 50 square miles. Once in a while, a brown or cinnamon colored black bear is spotted.

Wild black bears are one of New York State's largest land animals, with large males standing almost six feet tall. They are very resourceful animals and will eat pretty much anything. Black bears are omnivores because they eat both plants and animals. However, they eat mostly plants. Their diet can range from plants such as clover and skunk cabbage to berries, fruits, insects, meat, and, of course, honey. Black bears will also eat



Bill Banaszewski

Female and three, five-week old cubs in a den

human food, such as garbage left behind at a campsite or in a garbage bin. They will even eat birdseed straight from bird feeders. Sunflower is a favorite seed of black bears.

During winter, when food is scarce, black bears find a den and basically sleep away the cold months. Unlike a true hibernator, denned black bears maintain a near normal body temperature that allows them to quickly react to any situation. During the four to six months that bears are in their dens, they will not eat, drink, or "go to the bathroom". At the end of January or early February, females give birth to two or three, half-pound blind cubs. When they leave their dens in April or May, the cubs will weigh around ten pounds.

Black bears have good eyesight, even better hearing, and their sense of smell is much better than ours. They can climb tall trees and even swim across small lakes and ponds. There are close to 8,000 bears in New York State. Some common places where they can be spotted are in the Catskill and Adirondack mountains.



DEC studies bear populations