

OUTDOORS

How to be 'Bear Wise' this summer

Whether you are spending the day on the trail or camping overnight, remember to pick up all trash and be Bear-Wise, encourages the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' Wildlife Resources Division (WRD).

“Taking a few simple steps to be BearWise can help make outdoor adventures safer and more enjoyable for everyone, while also helping keep bears wild” says Adam Hammond, WRD’s State Bear Biologist. “Wild black bears naturally avoid people, but unsecured food, trash, and food scraps can attract them to campsites and trails. Planning ahead, cleaning up after yourself and properly storing food can help prevent wildlife conflicts.”

Georgia has three distinct populations of black bears, in the north Georgia mountains, in central Georgia along the Ocmulgee River, in and around the Okefenokee Swamp in south-east Georgia, and occasionally, anywhere in between.

Let’s Review Some Outdoor BearWise Basics:

Stay Alert: Pay attention to your surroundings. Keep kids within sight and close by. Leave earbuds at home and enjoy the sounds of nature. Often, bears will hear you coming and avoid unnecessarily



Above, a black bear in a tree. Black bears are mostly found in Georgia in the north Georgia mountains, along the Ocmulgee River, and around the Okefenokee Dwamp – Photo by Scott McDonald/Georgia DNR.

close interactions.

Leave No Trash or Food Scraps: Double bag your food when hiking and pack out all food and trash. Don’t burn food scraps or trash in your fire ring or grill. Leaving scraps, wrappers, or even harmless items like apple cores teaches bears to associate trails and campsites with food.

Keep Dogs Leashed: Letting dogs chase or bark at bears is asking for trouble; don’t force a bear to defend itself. Keep your dogs leashed at all times or leave them at home.

Camp Safely: Set up camp away from dense vegetation and natural food sources. Cook as

far from your tent as possible. Do not store food, trash, clothes worn while cooking, or toiletries in your tent. Store in approved bear-resistant containers OR out of sight in a locked vehicle OR suspended at least 10 feet above the ground and 10 feet from any part of the tree.

If You Encounter a Black Bear: If you see a bear before it notices you, don’t approach. Stand still, enjoy, then quietly move away. If a bear sees you, back away slowly. If the bear continues to approach, be prepared to stand your ground, wave your arms and yell, and throw sticks or rocks until it

leaves. Be ready to put up an aggressive fight, if necessary. If it keeps approaching and you have bear spray, be prepared to use it.. If you are in a group, stay together.

BearWise is the national program of the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies dedicated to helping people live responsibly with bears. BearWise was developed by state bear biologists, is anchored by the website BearWise.org and offers citizens specific, detailed, and high-quality information, engaging education pieces, and more.

For more info, visit BearWise.org.



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