

2014 Newsletter Town of Hartford's Conservation Commission



Black Bears in Vermont
How to live with them
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So, in spite of a very wet spring and summer of 2013, the Hartford Conservation Commission (HCC) was out and about working on various projects throughout Hartford.

In April, which turned out to be a drier month of spring, the public was invited to join the HCC on a hike in the Hartford Town Forest for a family friendly hike to view one of the vernal pools. Vernal pools can be magical places and reveal many surprises. We are often lucky to see Wood Frogs, Yellow Spotted Salamanders, lots of eggs in the pool and other wonders of nature. We invite you to join us - check the website for the date of this year's event. Due to the nature of the walk, and viewing of the pond, your dogs do have to stay home from this hike.

The Hartford Conservation Commission was established in 1990. Its charge is to:

- develop an inventory of natural resources throughout Hartford;
- maintain and preserve natural areas; acquire and protect valuable wildlife habitat, scenic view shed and watershed areas;
- educate and increase awareness of conservation and recreation goals and impacts; and
- encourage recreational uses consistent with the preservation of the natural beauty that exists within our town.

In February we lead a snowshoe or on-foot hike depending on what Mother Nature provides. We often see evidence of wildlife as we travel into and through their world.

Green-Up Day in Hartford expanded to more than a day, closer to a week, as the HCC and residents and area businesses all worked together to help clean up and green up Hartford. A record amount of trash was removed from our roads and river banks. More hands makes light work for all, please come join us this year! To participate, please contact Matt Osborn: (802) 295-3075.

In early June each year, the HCC hosts a Trails Day event for the Hartford Town Forest and

Maanawaka Conservation Area. The Town does not have paid staff (neither does the HCC) to maintain the various trails and rely on trail users to help with maintenance. If you, your family or your group enjoy the trails, please come spend a few hours on Trails Day to help with trail maintenance to keep the trails in good shape. Please check the website or contact Matt Osborn (802) 295-3075 with questions. For 2014, the scheduled Trails Day is Sunday, June 8th. The group will meet at the Hartford Town Forest from 9:00 a.m. through noon. A lot of time and effort went into the removal of Invasive Plants taking over
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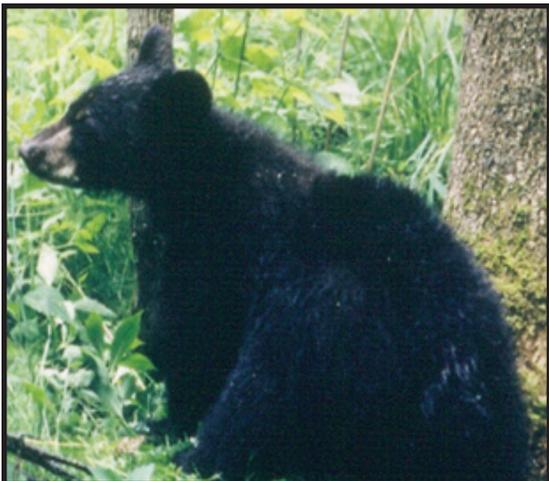
Living with Black Bears

What you need to know about black bears and how we can all survive together in Vermont!

Bear Habitat

Bears prefer a mixture of coniferous trees, hardwoods, wetlands, and mixed terrain to make their homes. Bears need dense wooded areas to hide and escape danger. Stands of beech and oak trees provide shelter and also a food source for bears. Bears do climb trees and readily climb to reach apples and other fruit. They will also climb posts with bird feeders mounted on them. Bird seed will attract bears into yards where they normally would not go, if food sources are scarce and they are hungry.

Bears typically return to the den for winter by mid-November. If food sources are plentiful, they will continue eating until the source is used up. A den can be a brush pile, cave in a rocky ledge, a hollow in a large tree or in a fallen log, a hole dug into a hill side, or shelter under an uprooted tree. Females tend to be pickier about where they den, and line the den with leaves, grasses, ferns, moss and stripped bark. Male bears bed down almost anywhere.



Bear Facts

The black bear (*Ursus americanus*) is the smallest of the three bear species found in North America. It is the only bear found in Vermont.

Adult female black bears in Vermont average between 120 and 180 pounds. It is uncommon for a female to exceed 200 pounds. In contrast, male black bears are generally larger, weighing 300-400 pounds.

Vermont black bears are relatively shy animals and are seldom seen by people. Bears prefer wild areas with fewer people. Bears are less likely to approach populated areas. However - when natural food supplies are low, bears may be attracted to bird feeders and garbage cans, and can become a nuisance or a potential danger to people and pets.

The haircoat is generally black, but some bears have a white 'Y' shaped marking on their chest. They have long, thick fur which generally makes them seem larger than they actually are. Bears have an excellent sense of smell and keen hearing. Black bears reach maturity at 3 years of age. Then they can start a breeding cycle. Females produce cubs every other year, if they are healthy and have enough body fat to sustain cubs during gestation. The breeding cycle of bears occurs in June and July. Cubs are born in late January or early February while the mother is denning (bear version of hibernating). Females can produce one to five cubs; the average is two. When born, cubs are about the size of a chipmunk! Cubs remain with their mothers until approximately 16 months of age. Young males must then move on to their own territory while young females tend to stay in their mother's territory.

Bears scavenge extensively starting in early spring when food sources are scarce. Once they emerge from their dens in the spring, bears have difficulty finding foods until early summer, when berries and roots (jack-in-the-pulpit) become available. Bears are omnivorous, meaning they eat meat as well as plants, nuts, and berries. Bears will eat young deer or moose should they happen upon them, though they do not actively hunt for them. Chickens are another food source, should they find their way to your coop. With summer, berries become available. Bears love the assorted summer berries, which are high in sugars and help provide the needed fat reserves for surviving the following winter. Late summer and fall months bring corn, cherries, oats, acorns, beech nuts, and bears do truly raid honey bees of their honey. Fall is when bears do their most concentrated eating and will travel miles to find and consume the nuts and other foods needed for that essential fat layer.

Okay, did you read the facts? Bears do just fine in the wild and without interference, will continue to do so.

The problem is - we humans are encroaching on the bears' natural habitat. And we are making it very easy for the bears to be led astray and come to our habitat. Which gets them killed!

Bears that start coming to us for food - be it in a campsite, back yard, farm, barn or garbage disposal area run the risk of being hit by vehicles in the road, shot (illegally, not during a designated hunting season) or have to be destroyed because it has become a nuisance or danger.

How are we attracting bears to our habitat? We provide food by leaving out bird feeders (December 1st to April 1st is the recommended time for feeders); leaving pet food outside, the barbecue grill lures bear, and garbage left out too long will definitely attract bears.

Bears are normally a shy animal and stay to themselves. But if you start feeding them (not necessarily on purpose), they will lose that shyness and start getting pushy for more food. Now they can become a danger to you, your family, your pets or livestock and to your property. Eventually, the only way to stop the bear is to destroy it. And all because you fed it to get its picture hanging out in your yard.

How do we prevent this tragic result and continue to enjoy bear in their native habitat?

- Remove bird feeders in the spring until the following December
- Keep barbecue grills clean - and inside if you can
- Dispose of garbage frequently so it's not outside your home
- Don't put garbage out the night before
- Feed your pets inside
- When camping, store food in your vehicle or hanging from a tree branch 10 feet up. (bears can climb trees though, if you read the Bear Facts)
- Feed for livestock should be sealed in air tight containers



According to the VT Fish & Wildlife Department, bears that are fed or lured to home owners property tend to have their life expectancy cut in half!



Awww - isn't that cute?

NO - bears should not be on your deck, patio, porch or in your yard!

**Remember...
A fed bear is a
dead bear!**

VT Fish and Wildlife Department

**What to do if you find a
bear in your yard...**

- Try to scare the bear away
- Yell or clap your hands
- In your car? Blow the horn

Remember, the point is to safely get the bear out of your yard. Do not approach it - stay a safe distance.

Do not encourage the bear by feeding it.

Do not be nice, take its picture, or call the neighbors to view it.

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our road sides, river banks and forests. The HCC focused on Garlic Mustard, even leading a garlic pulling party and many bags of garlic mustard was pulled. The HCC partnered with the Hartford Village Libraries, who featured a Show and Tell on garlic mustard plants. To learn more about this and other invasive plants, pick up copies of our educational brochures. These are available at the libraries, the Town Office, and can be found online (scroll to the bottom of the page):

www.hartford-vt.org/content/conservation/

The HCC offered advice, helping several landowners with conservation easements, and helping with fees accrued during the process. Land conservation is beneficial to many. To learn more about conservation easements, please visit the following site:

bit.ly/1m7QEfh

Visit this website to learn more about black bears:

www.mnr.gov.on.ca/en/Business/Bearwise/

Join us!

Please see the Calendar of Events and website for HCC's 2014 activities.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

April 19, Saturday: Vernal Pool Salamander Walk, Fun for families! (sorry- no dogs). 10:00 a.m. - noon, Hartford Town Forest

April 28 – May 3 Green-Up Hartford Days, green-up bags available at Municipal Office

May 3, Saturday: Green-Up Day/Arbor Day Celebration, 8:30 a.m. - noon, Lyman Point Park. Green up bags, tree and shrub sale

June 7, Saturday: Household Hazardous Waste Collection, 9:00 a.m. - noon, Hartford Transfer Station on Route 5.

June 8, Sunday: Trails Day, 9:00 a.m. - noon, Hartford Town Forest

Sept. 20, Saturday: Household Hazardous Waste Collection, Woodstock Town Garage, west of town on Route 4.

Feb. TBA, 2015 Wildlife Tracking Snowshoe, Hartford Town Forest

HCC members: Jon Bouton (Chair), Janice Berger, Karen Douville, Mary Hutchins, Shawn Kelley, and Jim Peters.

Thank you to the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department for use of the photos and information regarding black bears!

If you are being bothered by bear, or if one is causing damage on your property, please contact the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department for assistance. Website: www.vtfishandwildlife.com