

# LIVING WITH WILDLIFE

## Humane, Effective Solutions to Human-Wildlife Conflicts

A Program of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals



### Keep Black-Bear Encounters to a Minimum

*In cities, suburbs, and small towns across Massachusetts, people are noticing a change in their neighborhoods. Some think it's good. Some think it's bad. But everybody seems to be talking about it: more wild animals are making their homes in and around people's yards and houses, in parks and playgrounds, in business developments, even right on Main Street.*

*Reports of human-bear encounters in New England have increased because undeveloped land is dwindling. Although black bears normally shy away from humans, you can take steps to ensure that they stay at a distance. If you do encounter a black bear, this publication describes what you should do to stay safe.*

#### General Information

The bears you may encounter in Massachusetts are black bears, the most common of the three bear types that live in North America. Black bears grow to about five feet tall and can weigh 100–600 pounds. A black bear's diet consists mostly of fruits, nuts, and insects along with small live prey and carrion. Black bears live solitary lives except when they are courting mates and rearing cubs. Cubs are usually born in the spring and stay with their mothers until they are about two years old.

They become sexually mature at about age three but usually don't breed until age five.

#### Possible Conflicts and Solutions

Although black bears have historically shied away from humans, they may wander onto human-inhabited property, primarily looking for food. Take these steps to keep them afar:

- Eliminate all food sources from your yard to avoid attracting wild

an area where you know bears may be present, carry hot-pepper spray with capsaicin as the active ingredient. If sprayed from 7 to 10 feet away, the repellent irritates the eyes without permanently injuring the animal.

Take the following steps if you spot a bear (please note: These tips are for encounters with black bears only; if you are traveling in areas where other types of bears may be present, seek information and advice about how to handle bear encounters in those regions):

- Stay calm and never approach the bear.
- Wave your arms and appear as big as possible.
- Make noise by banging objects or by shouting in a human voice. Do not imitate a bear's growl or other animal noises.
- If all else fails, throw things at the bear to get him to move on.
- In the unlikely event that the bear bluff-charges, experts advise standing still, since the bluff charge is usually a warning before the bear turns and moves off. If attacked by a black bear, be aggressive and fight back.

#### Public-Health Concerns

As with all mammals, bears can contract rabies.

For more information, contact the Living With Wildlife program, [lww@mspca.org](mailto:lww@mspca.org), (617) 522-7400, or

#### THE LIVING WITH WILDLIFE MISSION

*The MSPCA Living With Wildlife program aims to protect wild species, now and in the future. The program promotes peaceful coexistence between people and wildlife in urban, suburban, and rural Massachusetts communities by helping to resolve human-animal conflicts in a humane, nonlethal, long-term, and cost-effective manner.*

neighbors. Open compost piles, bird feeders, grills, garbage, and pet food appeal to bears.

- Limit bear access to beehives, orchards, and farms. Install electric fencing and heavy-gauge fencing with barbed wire.
- Install motion light sensors and use loud radios.

A bear encounter can be scary. These animals are most dangerous when they are accompanied by cubs, are feeding or guarding food, are injured, or are startled by the sudden appearance of a human. Bears that have frequent exposure to humans in campgrounds or around garbage dumps are less fearful and can be more dangerous. If you are in