

South Carolina wildlife official offers tips for coexisting with black bears

THE JOURNAL STAFF

COLUMBIA — Warmer weather is here, and with it comes roving black bears — most of whom are looking for a quick meal.

The most common human-bear conflicts involve unsecured food, according to the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, so keeping things such as garbage, bird feeders and pet food secure is crucial to keeping bears from stopping by.

“The mere presence of a black bear does not necessarily represent a problem,” SCDNR black bear biologist Tammy Waldrop said. “Most bears are just passing through, but if there is an easy meal available, they will take advantage of it. The key to dealing with wandering bears is not giving them a reason to hang around. Removing any food source that would attract bears will significantly reduce any bear issues in residential areas.”

Waldrop listed six basic tips to help residents “better coexist” with bears.

- Never feed or approach bears. Intentionally feeding bears or letting them find anything that smells or tastes like food teaches them to approach homes and people looking for more.

- Secure food, garbage and recycling. Food and food odors attract bears, so don't reward them with easily available food, liquids or garbage.

- Remove bird feeders when bears are active. Bears are drawn to bird-



SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

Black bears are usually shy, evasive and non-aggressive toward people, but they should be respected as wild animals.

seed and grains for the high calories, so removing feeders is the best way to avoid conflicts with bears.

- Never leave pet food outdoors. Feed pets inside when possible, but if you have to feed them outside, set out single portions and remove the bowls afterward. Store pet food where bears can't see or smell it.

- Clean and store grills and smokers. Clean grills after each use and make sure that all grease, fat and food remnants are removed. Store clean grills and smokers somewhere secure enough to keep bears out.

- Alert neighbors to bear activity. If you see bears in the area or

evidence of bear activity, tell your neighbors and share information about how to avoid bear conflicts.

SCNDR also reminded people bears are wild animals and should be respected as such.

Black bears are usually shy, evasive and non-aggressive toward people, the agency said, and people and black bears can live in the same area with little conflict by following basic rules.

Report black bear sightings at dnr.sc.gov/wildlife/bear/sighting-form.html.

For emergencies involving black bears, call 1-800-922-5431 or 911.