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Bear sightings reported in Highlands rim towns

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BY MICHELLE LEE
THE RECORD
STAFF WRITER

The days are getting longer and warmer: Time for black bears to roll out of bed — and start snacking.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WILLIAM BUDESHEIM

A bear runs across Newark Pompton Turnpike in Riverdale Wednesday.

Seifried said Wednesday.

The bears have been walking on streets and wandering around back yards, Seifried said. Similar sightings have also been reported along Route 287, by Dumpsters and in the industrial and residential areas of [Riverdale](#). No people and pets have been injured, according to police, who by now are totally familiar with what's motivating the omnivores.

"They're roaming around day and night — they're hungry," Seifried said. "Our PBA was going to buy them pizza, but they don't stop eating."

Bear safety tips

Black bears by nature tend to be wary of people. But should you encounter one, state wildlife staff offer these refreshers:

- Never feed or approach a bear.
- In an encounter or sighting, stay calm, make the bear aware you're there by speaking assertively or making other noises. Avoid direct eye contact and never run from a bear. Instead, slowly back away.
- Make sure the bear has an escape route. If a bear enters your home, give it escape routes by propping all doors open. To scare it away, make loud noises and make yourself look as big as possible by waving your arms. If you are with

Communities on the rim of the Highlands are already reporting — a tad early this year — sightings of bears checking out what's new to eat under the snow melt.

The [Pompton Lakes Police Department](#) have been getting at least 30 calls a day over the past month from residents reporting black bears in the northern part of the borough, especially along [Broad Street](#) and [Midland, Montclair and Ringwood](#) avenues, Chief David Struyk and Detective Lt. Steve

Contrary to popular belief, black bears can be active in the winter, but generally they snooze away the cold season, relying on the fat they've stored up from non-stop noshing in prior warmer months. Human-bear encounters are usually more frequent in late April and May when the weather is warmer, said Larry Ragonese, a state Department of Environmental Protection spokesman.

Most bears, especially the

someone else, stand close together with your arms raised.

- If a bear huffs, makes popping jaw sounds, and swats the ground, it means you're too close. Again, slowly back away, avoid direct eye contact and don't run. If a bear stands on its hind legs or moves closer, it may be trying to get a better idea of what it faces and isn't usually threatening you. Attacks are extremely rare, but if it happens, fight back.
- Black bears will sometimes "bluff charge" when feeling threatened or trying to steal food. Stand your ground, avoid direct eye contact, then slowly back away — don't run.
- If the bear does not leave, move to a secure area. Report bear damage or nuisance behavior to the Department of Environmental Protection's 24-hour, toll-free hotline at 1-877-WARN DEP (1-877-927-6337).
- Families in black bear home territory should have a "Bear Plan" in place for children, with an escape route and planned use of loud noisemakers.

Source: N.J. Division of Fish and Wildlife, DEP.

Burgess, the biologist with the DEP Division of Fish and Wildlife and the leader of the state's black bear project.

"If we get another cold spell, or we get another snowstorm, you'll see them become less active," Burgess said. The "busy time" for black bears, he added, will be at the end of May and June, during the breeding season.

New Jersey wildlife staff continue sometimes controversial efforts to curb the growing black bear population, particularly in the northwestern part of the state. The DEP estimated there were about 3,400 bears in New Jersey before a state-sanctioned hunt in early December killed 591 of them, including 210 in an area encompassing a piece of [Bergen County](#) and most of northern [Passaic](#) and [Morris](#) counties.

Burgess said the hunt was successful in killing about 17 percent of the population, but he said "a burst of cubs" born after January will probably replace the bears taken. "We still have a population that's going to be growing," he said. "But it's going to be growing at a slower rate."

Ragonese said scientists will review the bear numbers again this year and state officials will take a look at possibly holding another hunt.

"It's not a definite plan to do it again," Ragonese said. "We will assess it in coming months."

The DEP received numerous bear reports throughout the northern suburbs in 2010, Ragonese said, with some sightings as unusual as at a golf course in [Ridgewood](#), in densely suburban [Paramus](#) and even by the George Washington Bridge.

DEP officials and the local police are settling into another year of what has become routine advice to the public:

- Stay away from the bears and avoid interacting with them.
- It's illegal to feed them.
- Take steps at home to avoid attracting hungry bears, such as keeping pets and pet food indoors at night and locking up garbage cans in enclosed areas.

"Let common sense apply here, because they're soft, cuddly and cute, but they can kill you," Seifried said. "Not that they would, but we want to err on the side of caution."

Also, by now, bears are supposed to be a normal part of New Jersey's ecological scenery; Seifried said the public should call police only if a bear attacks or acts in an aggressive manner. State policy, in that event, has been to come and capture the bear for euthanization.

For more information about bears, visit www.njfishandwildlife.com/bearfacts.htm

females, spend the cold months "denning" or spending time in warm places, such as a hollow tree, underneath a deck or in a hole in the ground. "But that doesn't mean they're all sleeping and that you'll never see a bear in winter," Ragonese said. "They're all less active."

This time of year, it's mainly adult males that become active, although there have also been a few females with yearlings spotted.

In the forest, bears dine on a variety of plants, nuts, berries, insects, and the odd animal prey. But many also are on the move through suburbanized North Jersey because it offers a smorgasbord of garbage and birdfeeders, said Kelcey



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Pompton Lakes Police get numerous reports of bear sightings

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SUBURBAN TRENDS

POMPTON LAKES - Police are urging residents to take simple precautions in light of many black bear sightings in the north-west end of the community near Wanaque.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WILLIAM BUDESHEIM

This photos were taken around noon Wednesday in Riverdale. A mother was separated from two family members. She was on the side of NPT by Family Carpets and was just sitting down 'crying' or 'groaning'. Finally the other two took a chance and crossed over Newark Pompton Turnpike to be with the mother. Fortunately none of them were hit by a car.

Department at 973-835-0400.

The main points to remember when living in bear country, according to Seifried, are to stay away from the bears and not approach them.

In addition, since bears are drawn to neighborhoods by easy pickings from the garbage, residents should handle their trash with care, placing refuse cans in a locked storage area, such as a garage or shed.

It's "an inconvenience" but it works, he said.

Not only trash, but bird feeders and pet food can attract bears when it is left outdoors within bears' reach. It's best not to make these food sources available, he said.

It's also best, said Seifried, not to leave small children unattended in the yard at this time.

In a recent press release, he said, "Be advised that these bears are in search of food. If you lock up the garbage and take away their source of food, they will go elsewhere to find it."

Over the last several weeks, according to Detective Lt. Steve Seifried, the Police Department has taken plenty of calls about bear sightings in areas like Broad Street and Midland, **Montclair** and **Ringwood** avenues.

The weather is apparently warming up to the point where bears are emerging from their dens for the spring.

The NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife has been contacted about the bears, but unless the animals become aggressive or attack, the division will not respond, said Seifried.

He is asking residents to come forward if they do see a bear acting in an aggressive manner and call the Police