



MY TOWN, OUTDOORS

Bears in Southern Maryland? Here's why.

by **JeroldMassie**

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Waldorf, MD – Over the past two weeks, there have been several sightings of a black bear in Southern Maryland. Beginning in Silver

Spring on June 12, the juvenile, weighing approximately 150-pounds, has been nosing around and was recently spotted in the suburbs of Waldorf.

“Basically, we’ve got what equates to some confused teenage bears,” explained Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MD DNR) State Black Bear Biologist Harry Spiker.

Spiker who spends a lot of his time in Western Maryland, the bear's native area, explained that though it is not common, it isn't uncharacteristic for these teenage bears to travel long distances after being chased off by their mothers.

The Black Bear Biologist then detailed the life cycle of these bears in their young lives. He explained that their mothers give birth every other year, caring for the cubs through the winter before “kicking them out” in May/June. She does this so that the bears can find a territory of their own and leave their mom to have more cubs.

Currently, the state's DNR is aware of “one or two” bears in Central Maryland (Baltimore/Howard area) as well as the one in Southern Maryland. Spiker Stated that citizens often ask why the department can't move the bears back west but explained that simply “letting them do their own thing” is more times than not “safer” for both the bear and residents in non-native areas.

Taking the bears anywhere from a couple of days to a few weeks to move back north, they will eventually be motivated by a lack of other bears to return from where they came. In the meantime, however, Spiker said it might not be uncommon for our visitor to travel across rivers, meaning a visit to Calvert or St. Mary's Counties is not out of the question.

“Most bears would not try a swim like that, but some will. I know of bears that have been caught swimming back and forth on the Barrier Islands of the coast of North Carolina. They are excellent swimmers, and some will make the swim.”

Spiker's advice to Southern Maryland residents is to lock up their

trash and, should the bear enter your area, bring bird feeders inside. He explained that the bears are “opportunistic omnivores,” meaning they want an easy meal. Spiker finished by ensuring the bear will “typically” run if it sees a person and if you do get caught out in the open with it, try not to corner the bear and make yourself look big while making much noise.

The black bear population in Maryland currently sits at an approximate, healthy, 2,200 adults across the four western counties.

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