

# WOLF LAUREL WILDLIFE – AND BEAR SAFETY!

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Wolf Laurel is a beautiful community with so much forested lands surrounding us. With all that natural beauty comes a myriad of wildlife. The Northern Brown Water snake populates our Village Pond (a non-venomous species), deer and turkey are of course numerous through out the community along with many bird species, coyote, rabbit, raccoon, and of course, black bear.

According to the NC Wildlife Resources Commission, the black bear is the only bear species found in North Carolina or anywhere in the eastern US. The successful comeback of the American black bear in North Carolina represents one of wildlife management's greatest achievements. Black bears were once restricted to remote areas and reached very low population levels in the mid-1900s. Today, black bears are found approximately 60% of the total land area of North Carolina.

The black bear is an omnivore with a diet of both plants and animals. It varies in color: in North Carolina, the black bear is usually black with a brown muzzle and sometimes a white patch on its chest, commonly referred to as a chest blaze. Black bears rely mostly on their sense of smell and hearing due to poor eyesight, but are adept at climbing, running, swimming and digging. **They have been clocked at speeds of 35 miles per hour over short distances.**

Bears prefer large expanses of uninhabited woodland or swampland with dense cover which provide good bear habitat. Recent research has shown bears to be much more adaptable to habitat changes than previously thought and some bears have adapted to living near developed areas.

That brings us back to bears in our community. It's always a thrill to see wildlife so close and to experience such a wonderful connection to nature. One big consideration is how to live with black bear and other wildlife without our interactions becoming problematic for us and for the bears. While bears normally avoid humans, they can be attracted to homes and backyards by the food they can find. The following guidelines provided by Appalachian Black Bear give us 'food for thought'. A bear can be considered a nuisance when it becomes used to finding human food and garbage in areas where people live or recreate. Carelessly stored food, garbage, even barbecue grills and bird feeders can all attract bears and keep them coming back. The outcome is often a dead bear and even orphaned cubs. This can be remedied by eliminating the source of the attraction. Bears are known to be particularly intelligent and will easily remember where an easy source of food can be found. This applies to adult bear AND bear cubs.

As much as you may enjoy putting corn out for deer, enjoying watching the birds feed at your feeders, please consider doing all you can to help prevent bear from becoming 'food conditioned'. As a community, we can still enjoy the wildlife without feeding – ultimately the bears. It's important to eliminate as many of the potential food sources as we can. Consider:

- Putting bird feeders away at night (or better yet, just enjoy an outing of bird watching naturally!)
- Not feeding or baiting wildlife with corn, etc.
- Locking up or storing grills, trash cans, etc., in your home/garage
- Not leaving pet food outside
- Picking fruit from fruit trees, etc., as regularly as possible – even disposing of rotting fruit left on the ground

We can continue to enjoy natural wildlife interaction and protect our wildlife by doing all we can to prevent wildlife from becoming a nuisance. Remember, a fed bear can become a dead bear. One bit of good news is that the acorn mast this year is good and bears may be less likely to seek other food sources, but remember that the acorn mast varies each year. So, keep vigilant about removing possible bear food sources in your yard – for the bears' sake and for your safety as well as your families' and neighbors' safety. If you would like to get more information about bear safety, please visit the Appalachian Bear Rescue website:

<http://appalachianbearrescue.org/>. We also have some info from ABR available in the WLPOA Community Center.

*“Remember, bears are far more likely to enhance your wilderness experience than spoil it. Knowing how to interpret their behavior and act responsibly is part of the thrill of sharing forests and mountains with these amazing creatures.” ABR*