

BLACK BEARS *of East Texas*

Black bears (*Ursus americanus*) are a part of the heritage of Texas. Historically, black bears were widely distributed throughout all major eco-regions in Texas prior to Anglo-American colonization in 1820, but by the 1950s, the last native East Texas bear was believed to have been killed in Polk County. Today, black bears are returning to their historic range in Texas. Since 1977, The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has documented black bear sightings and mortalities in Texas. Observations in the 1990s indicate the return of a few black bears, primarily transient solitary males, to the remote forests of East Texas. Black bears are listed as threatened by the state of Texas and the Louisiana black bear, *Ursus americanus luteolus*, formerly resident in eastern Texas, is federally listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

Mission Statement

The Mission of the East Texas Black Bear Task Force (ETBBTF) is to promote the restoration of the black bear in its historic range of east Texas through education, research and habitat management as outlined in the East Texas Black Bear Conservation and Management Plan (2005-2015). The ETBBTF will strive to accomplish its mission through partnerships among stakeholders, credible science-driven management, cooperation, and a genuine commitment to bear restoration.



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Black Bear Facts

Bears are one of the world's most adaptable carnivores. Their reasoning ability, long-term memory, omnivorous food habits, dexterity, speed, strength, sense of smell, and elusive behavior, contribute to their success.

Black bears in Texas are generally black with a brown muzzle, some have a distinct white "blaze" on their chest. Adult males generally weigh from 150 to 350 pounds, and adult females range from 120 to over 250 pounds. Body length of adults, nose to tail, ranges up to 6 feet.

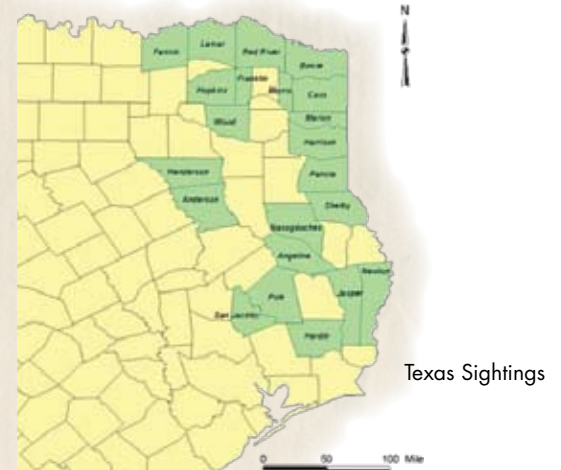
Female black bears become sexually mature at 3 to 5 years of age and have 1 to 5 cubs every other year. The young remain with their mother the first year, den with her the following winter, and search for their own territory in their second summer. Females often establish home ranges close to their mothers.



Black bears are very intelligent, shy and secretive animals, and generally work hard at avoiding contact with humans. Although, once a bear acquires human food, it often loses its fear of people and can become habituated and sometimes problematic. Problems vary from the simple presence of a bear, perceived as dangerous, to actual property damage or possible safety threats. The best advice is for humans to avoid close bear encounters.

Habitat

In East Texas, black bears are primarily found in areas dominated by bottomland hardwoods and floodplain forests, but can also be found in upland hardwoods, mixed pine/hardwoods, coastal flatwoods, and marshes.



In general, black bears may range from 10 to 250 square miles. Adult males occupy the largest areas, while females usually establish a significantly smaller home range closer to their mother or natal area.

The black bear's habitat requirements include food, cover and water. Additionally, they require suitable denning sites and relatively large blocks of land, preferably with minimum human disturbance. Garner and Willis (1998) found the most suitable habitat in East Texas to be the Middle Neches River Corridor because it has suitable food and cover, as well as low levels of human/bear conflict zones and relatively low open road density. Frequently traveled roads are hazardous to bears, but smaller, less traveled roads are much more tolerable.



Enclosures within your Media folder

- Introduction Letter and Contact list for Media
- Black Bear Conservation Committee Brochure
- Black Bear Facts and Information
- Bear Safety Hunters Education Brochure
- Press Kit/Media Release CD
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Black Bears in Texas Brochure



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