

What is this category system I keep hearing about?

In 2000, the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) developed the “category system” of labeling bears.

This subjective system is highly controversial, as it does not consider human irresponsibility or the fact that bears are typically exhibiting normal behavior in all three categories. Moreover, bears exhibiting no aggression have been labeled Category I and killed for property damage related to human attractants (see our **Bear Proofing Tips** handout).

- **Category I** – Bears who are perceived to be an immediate threat to life and property. These bears can be killed

immediately or trapped to be killed by division personnel, law enforcement, and park rangers. A bear coming within 10 feet of a house is considered a Category 1 bear even if the homeowner is responsible for attracting the bear.

- **Category II** – “Nuisance” bears who are not a threat to life and property. Aversive conditioning techniques are applied. Please note that the DFW’s promotion of baiting for deer and bears reduces the effectiveness of aversive conditioning techniques and habituates the bears to unnatural food sources.
- **Category III** – Bears exhibiting normal behavior. As stated before bears are typically exhibiting normal behavior in all three categories.

Aversive Conditioning - how to chase bears from your yard



By actively discouraging the bear, you become the alpha bear staking out your territory. Aversive conditioning reinforces the bear’s natural fear and territorial instincts. When used properly, aversively conditioned bears quickly learn which behaviors and areas are unacceptable. Aversive conditioning is internationally recognized.

What are some basic aversive conditioning techniques?

Start intense and vary your tactics to scare bears away.

- wave your arms over your head and stomp your feet
- open and close an umbrella, turn on the garden hose
- use air horns, shake coins in a tin can or blow whistles
- bang pots & pans, generally make loud noises, be creative

Being assertive toward the bears through body language (waving your arms, stomping your feet and making loud noises) will also be very helpful in teaching them to fear YOU.

If a bear is in your yard, take the appropriate steps to chase him off. Allowing a bear to linger while you hide in the house only teaches him that HE is the boss, not you.

Make whatever efforts you are comfortable with to assert your dominance over the bear. Instruct children to wave their arms and stomp their feet, and then walk slowly to the house.

Animal Protection League of New Jersey
Bear Education And Resource
PO Box 186
Glen Gardner, NJ 08826
732-446-6808 option 5
BearSmartNJ.org

A black bear is climbing a tree trunk. The bear's head and front paws are visible as it ascends the tree. The background is a blurred forest scene.

So what do
I do...
if I see
a bear?

*And other
commonly
asked questions*

The answer depends on whether you are in their natural habitat or in a residential area.

In their natural habitat:

- Encountering a bear in the wild is not that common. Most people are thrilled to see one.
- Make noise as you walk.
- Take a picture or do nothing.
- Allow the bear to walk away.
- Don't corner or feed the bear.
- Wave your arms above your head, stomp your feet, and speak softly as you back away.
- Do not climb up a tree.
- Remember, a bluff charge is when a bear charges but stops before making contact. They are scary but rare and a sign the bear is fearful, not aggressive.
- Treasure the moment.

In residential areas:

- Most bears are just passing through. Do nothing. Stay inside.
- Don't feed the bear!
- To discourage them you can use basic aversive conditioning techniques, examples of which are on the reverse.

How do I prevent bears from entering my neighborhood?

It's easy. Become a Bear Smart community by visiting BearSmartNJ.org to learn the 3 Simple Steps: Contain, Implement, and Educate. Through these simple measures the incidence of human/bear interactions can be greatly reduced. A fully effective Bear Smart community requires participation on the part of homeowners, businesses, schools, campgrounds, community leaders, and public policy makers.

What do you advise parents to do when bears are seen in residential areas?

It is always wise to supervise your children, no matter where



you live. Black bears are naturally wary of humans and are a gentle species. Despite the fact that black bears are timid, their size and behavior may be frightening to some. If you have just purchased or are considering purchasing a home in "bear country" learning about the true nature of black bears and becoming Bear Smart is essential. Fortunately, this is easy. The BEAR Group offers free presentations at libraries, schools, club houses, civic associations, and private residences. We also offer personal home evaluations on bear proofing. Call our hotline at 732-446-6808 and press 5 for more information.

How do bears help the environment?

Black bears eat the larvae of insects, such as Eastern Tent caterpillars that defoliate ornamental trees. Bear scat is a natural fertilizer. Their scat also

contains seeds of the fruits and plants they eat. These seeds help regenerate the forest understory. Black bears help keep the forests continually growing with new oxygen-cleaning plant life, which is vital for forest health. Vital in fact, for ALL life in New Jersey.

Are black bears overpopulating?

There is no scientific data anywhere that shows that black bears are overpopulated. Based on the quality and availability of food, black bears typically have their first litters between 3-11 years of age. Because of a unique phenomenon known as "delayed implantation," bear embryos will not become implanted if the female bear has not accumulated sufficient fat reserves to survive the winter. This is nature's way of regulating the population, the hallmark of a *self-regulating species*. By preventing

access to unnatural food sources such as garbage, we can ensure population control.

How long do cubs stay with their mothers?

Cubs are dependent upon their mothers for 18 – 24 months, to learn how to:

- run and climb to escape danger;
- forage for food, and;
- locate a den.

A mother bear disperses her yearlings during the mating season in May or June.

At first, the mother is torn between her yearlings and a male bear in the area, but within a day after dispersal, she will chase her yearlings away whenever she encounters them. This is often a troubling time for the yearlings, as they settle into their own territory. Initially, they stay within the mother's home range, spending long periods of time up trees. By the end of the summer, they are capable of being on their own.

What happens to orphaned bears?

Within the first year, cub mortality normally averages 30%. This number is much higher without the protection of their mother. Sadly, when there is a hunt, mothers are killed, leaving behind orphaned cubs who are inadequately prepared for living alone.

According to the Government of the Canadian Northwest Territories:

"Young bears are extremely vulnerable during their first year alone and mortality is high. Without the protection of their mother, yearlings are susceptible to the attacks of large male bears, and with their lack of foraging experience they are easily attracted by food at dumps and campsites, and may end up being shot as 'nuisance' bears."

