

Learn About Black Bears and Other Research Projects

Want more information on the science behind how the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) manages wildlife such as deer, eagles, elk, black bears, and other species? Want to know more about the scientific research involved in MDC setting hunting, fishing, and trapping regulations? Want more information on how MDC determines its forestry practices and the many benefits of trees? Want to know more about how MDC is working with landowners to help increase public hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching opportunities on private land?

MDC has recently launched a new website dedicated to the extensive scientific research staff do on these and other topics. Visit the new MDC website to learn more at research.mdc.mo.gov/ or go through the MDC main website at mdc.mo.gov/ and use the search box by typing “research.”

“Missouri Department of Conservation staff from various divisions all around the state conduct a wide variety of scientific research projects to help us protect and manage the fish, forests, and wildlife of the state,” explained MDC Resource Science Division Chief Jason Sumners. “These science-based research efforts also help us provide many opportunities for all Missourians to use, enjoy, and learn about these resources. Our new research website provides indepth information on many of these efforts for those who want to know more.”

BLACK BEAR RESEARCH

One topic of interest to many people is black bears in Missouri. Common questions include: Where are they and where do they move around? How many bears are there in the state and is the population growing? And will they be allowed to be hunted one day?

MDC has been conducting black bear research since 2010 to help answer these and other questions about these large and mostly secretive native animals.

“One new and very exciting feature of the new MDC research website is our Missouri Black Bear Project Story Map,” said MDC Furbearer Biologist and Black Bear Researcher Laura Conlee. “Our hope with this Story Map is to provide interesting and interactive content related to the black bear project in Missouri where people can explore maps, photos, and videos about Missouri black bears and the research we are conducting.”

Explore the Missouri Black Bear Project Story Map at mdc.mo.gov/BlackBearProjectStoryMap. The site includes maps of where black bears have been spotted, information on research efforts and results, and plenty of photos and videos of black bears – including peeks inside bear dens, and much more.

BE BEAR AWARE

Conlee also reminds people to never feed bears and to “Be Bear Aware.”

“Never feed bears and remember that bird feeders, trash, barbeque grills, and food waste left out at home or camp can all serve as huge attractions for bears,” she said. “When a bear associates food with people, it can become a problem and may have to be killed to keep people safe.”

MDC offers these tips for avoiding attracting black bears to possible food sources:

- Don't leave pet food sitting outside. Feed pets a portion they'll eat at each meal and remove the empty containers.
- Store garbage, recyclables, and compost inside a secure building or in a bear-proof container until the day of trash pick-up.
- Keep grills and smokers clean and store them inside.
- Don't use birdfeeders in bear country when bears are active from April through November.
- Use electric fencing to keep bears away from beehives, chicken coops, vegetable gardens, orchards, and other potential food sources.
- Keep campsites clean and store all food, toiletries and trash in a secure vehicle or strung high between two trees. Do not burn or bury garbage or food waste.

While close encounters are uncommon, MDC offers this advice when outdoors in black-bear country:

- Make noise while walking or hiking to prevent surprising a bear. Clap, sing, or talk loudly.
- Travel in a group if possible.
- Pay attention to the surroundings and watch for bear sign, such as tracks or claw or bite marks on trees.
- Keep dogs leashed.
- Leave a bear alone! Do not approach it. Make sure it has an escape route.
- If encountering a bear up close, back away slowly with arms raised to look larger. Speak in a calm, loud voice. Do not turn away from the bear. Back away slowly. Do not run.

For more information on black bears in Missouri and how to Be Bear Aware, visit the MDC website at mdc.mo.gov/bearaware.