

# Background on **BEARS IN NOVA SCOTIA**



## **What kind of bears are in Nova Scotia?**

The black bear (*Ursus americanus*) is the only species of bear in Nova Scotia.

## **What do bears eat?**

Bears have a diet of plant material (plants, berries, nuts, acorns, etc.), insects, fish and meat. They have a strong sense of smell and may travel great distances to find food. Bears like to eat many of the same foods as humans, so we need to be careful about how we manage food and food waste to avoid attracting bears. Learn more about [black bear diet and what attracts bears](#).

## **Where do bears live?**

There are bears in every county in Nova Scotia, although numbers vary across the province. Natural bear habitat includes forests and open areas with lots of other species and access to fresh water, but little human presence.

Bears are very adaptable and their main driver for choosing where to live is food. When we see bears around places where people live, it is usually because they can easily find lots of high-calorie human food. In years when their natural food sources are limited, they may be more likely to stay in areas where they can find human food.

## **How big is a bear's territory?**

A bear's territory is known as its home range. The range generally depends on the availability of food and can vary from under 10 to more than 200 square kilometres. Females have smaller ranges than males. Sometimes multiple bears have ranges that overlap. Dominant bears tend to have ranges in places with the best conditions. In 2023, work was initiated with Acadia University on new research that will help us better understand bear behaviour, movements and home ranges in Nova Scotia.

## **Are bears active year round?**

Bears hibernate through the winter until early spring. Hibernation is a state of very little activity and body function, although bears may wake once in a while during the winter. Bears usually make a den for hibernation under trees, rocks or brush.

In the spring, summer and fall, bears are very food motivated so they can survive hibernation and so females can be healthy enough to have cubs. During this time, bears can be active at any time of day. When they are in developed areas, they often prefer to be active at night to avoid humans. However, they can become comfortable around humans and active even during the day.

## When do bears have cubs?

Most black bears reach sexual maturity when they are three years old. Mating happens in early summer and healthy females usually produce one to three cubs, although more are possible. They give birth in dens during the winter and the cubs usually remain with the female until the following spring. Then the cubs leave to establish their own range. Females tend to stay near their birthplace and males tend to establish their range further away.

## How long can bears live?

The age of a bear can be determined by analyzing its teeth. This analysis shows that bears in Nova Scotia can live for more than 20 years.

## What is the bear population in Nova Scotia?

Bears generally avoid humans so it is difficult to observe and monitor them. We are updating our hunter reporting system to help us understand more about how the bear population is doing.

However, the information we collect from hunters and incidents that people report to us help us understand trends in the population. This information shows that, over the long term, Nova Scotia's bear population is growing and the number of bears harvested each year is staying about the same.

## How are bears managed in Nova Scotia?

Our goal is to have a stable and healthy bear population, living in their natural habitat without negatively affecting the ecosystem or creating safety problems in our communities.

We have [regulations](#) in place that limit hunters to one bear per year. We work with Nova Scotians to avoid human-bear conflicts mainly through education and outreach. We also use management techniques such as trap and release, hazing to instill fear of humans, and, as a last resort, euthanasia.

## How many bears are harvested each year in Nova Scotia?

Hunters are required to report their harvest and send the pre-molar teeth of the bear they harvested to the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables. Based on information reported, about 400 to 600 bears are harvested across the province each year.

## What methods can people use to hunt bear?

Hunters can hunt bear in Nova Scotia with a firearm (rifle, shotgun or muzzleloader) or archery (bow or crossbow).

## Where can I find out about requirements and training for hunters?

You can learn about hunter requirements and training on our [website](#).

## Where can I find out more and share my thoughts about the spring bear hunt pilot project?

We encourage you to visit the [website](#) to learn more and give us your feedback.

