

Black bear sightings increase in New Kent County

A bear was spotted near the 3700 block of Quinton Rd. (Courtesy of Kellie FitzPatrick)

By **Kassie Simmons**

Daily Press

JUNE 26, 2018, 3:00 PM

New Kent County Sheriff's Office shared a post on Facebook Sunday alerting the public about recent black bear sightings in the area.

Corp. Kevin Watkins shared that during the past three weeks, there have been several sightings in the Lanexa and Providence Forge area. It is not clear if there is more than one bear.

"There's no reason to be worried," Watkins said. "They're like a large raccoon looking for food and they try to avoid people."

The sheriff's office shared an article from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries about **living with black bears** in the area.

Kellie FitzPatrick said she saw a bear on her way to work one morning. After sharing what she saw with the owner of the property the bear was on, she learned that she wasn't the first.

"I usually listen out for our chickens and rooster to make their cheery noises in the morning," FitzPatrick said. "I would be scared to find out something happened to them in the middle of the night."

If you encounter a bear, VDGIF says you should not panic. Instead, back away slowly. Bears have an instinct to avoid humans and will run when given a safe escape route. If the bear is in a tree, leave it alone.

If a bear wanders into your yard, do not let it get comfortable. After ensuring there is a safe escape route for the bear, make lots of noise to encourage it to leave. Remove any non-natural foods that may attract bears.

If you experience a bear problem after taking appropriate steps of prevention, you may seek additional assistance by [contacting VDGIF](#).

Watkins believes mating season is to blame for the recent spike in sightings, as bears are more mobile. Mating season does not cause aggression in bears.

"Unless you corner it (or) get too close to its cubs, they're harmless," he said.

Black bears have been known to be in the area for the past several years, but the state's Black Bear Management Plan 2012-2021 states that the population has increased at a rate of 9 percent annually since 2001, which could account for the increase in sightings.

UPDATE: Additional bears have been spotted in King and Queen County and Gloucester County.

Amanda Ratcliffe says she nearly ran into what appeared to be a cub while it was crossing the road on her way to work.

The bear was in King and Queen County on The Trail near Sickal's Body Shop Wednesday morning around 7:30.

UPDATE: The New Kent Sheriff's Office received reports on July 4 of more bear sightings in the area of Old Roxbury Road, New Kent Highway and Henpeck Road.

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