

Opinion: Expect increase in bear activity

By Carl Lackey

As autumn begins, the appetite of the Sierra Nevada black bear takes a dramatic swing upward. Motivated by signals from nature known as zeitgebers, the bears spectacularly increase their daily caloric intake from 3,000 calories per day to upward of 25,000 calories per day.

This physiological wonder is known as hyperphagia. Nature's dinner bell is ringing.

Hyperphagia is a period where bears eat as much as they possibly can so they can put on as much fat as possible to carry them through winter hibernation. Nothing much gets in the bear's way when they are this hungry.

Armed with that big appetite and motivated by zeitgebers like decreased daily sunlight and cooler morning temperatures, the bears will search far and wide in the hunt for food. Those 25,000 calories are the human equivalent of eating about 50 cheeseburgers per day over the next couple of months.

The moon is at or nearly full for the rest of September and the first days of October. They will eat up to 20 hours per day during a full moon period as they pile on the fat. People living in bear country should not be tempting these already hungry bears with easy access to garbage, bird feeders, bowls of pet food or ripened fruit falling from trees.

Areas most at risk of attracting bears by granting access to garbage and other attractants are the Lake Tahoe Basin, west Carson City and the foothill areas of Douglas and Washoe counties.

Nevada has had four dry winters in a row and the natural foods that the bears desire are not in abundance in the wild lands. Plants that create nuts and berries like manzanita, squirrel tail, snowbush, desert peach and rosehips are highly desired but not always abundant in dry years. It will be a busy next few weeks in bear country.

People needing to report nuisance bear activity can call the NDOW's Bear Hotline telephone number at 775.688.2327. For information on living with bears persons can go **online** and find the "Bear Logic" page.

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