

Is there a black bear on the prowl here?

Written by CAROL POMEDAY
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Raided bee hive, plundered bird feeders may be evidence of bruin

Is a black bear prowling through Ozaukee County similar to the one that climbed a tree in Port Washington two years ago?

Jim Schwabenlender is convinced a bear destroyed one of three beehives on his property on Silver Shores Road in the Town of Belgium on Monday, June 11, and knocked down a half-dozen bird feeders two days later. He found what he believed to be bear scat nearby.

“On Monday night, I noticed one of the beehives was just destroyed, and there is nothing around here that could do that,” Schwabenlender said.

“All of the honey was licked out of it. There was about 20 pounds of honey.

“There is no doubt in my mind it was a bear.”

Schwabenlender said the nine frames in the beehive were strewn about and each one licked clean. He cleaned up the mess and wishes he had taken photographs. He has set up a trail video camera to record the animal if it returns.

“My guess is it’s a young male, probably a 2-year-old that was pushed out of the nest (den) by mom because she had new cubs,” he said.

Schwabenlender did not report the incidents to the Department of Natural Resources or anyone else, but Al Southall on Silver Beach Road, whose bird feeders were also knocked down, sent an e-mail to Tom Isaac, a DNR wildlife biologist.

Because he received only the one report on Thursday, June 14, Isaac is skeptical there is a bear around. If there is a bear in the area, he said, there are usually a series of bear-sighting reports that reveal the bear’s trail from northern Wisconsin, where the animals normally reside, and that hasn’t happened.

“But then, it could be in areas where it’s not very visible,” Isaac said. “I guarantee if there is an article in the paper, we’ll get more reports whether there’s a bear or not.

“Bears are a little different than cougars or wolves because they’re black and they’re out in the daytime so they’re usually seen if they’re in the area.”

Two weeks earlier, a black bear was reported along a trail in Kewaskum, Isaac said. The bear backed away from the trail and disappeared into a wooded area according to the report.

“We get bear reports year around. They’re not always bears, but they could be,” he said. “We have not had any other bear reports since the beehive was destroyed.

“It seems like we get a bear that comes through our area every few years, like the one two years ago we had to tranquilize.”

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Isaac, who was out of the office Friday and did not read the Southall's e-mail until Monday, informed Southall the beekeeper could seek compensation for the hive and lost honey. He also forwarded the report to Jeff Bell of the Ozaukee County Parks and Planning Department, who investigates claims for damages caused by wildlife, including bears.

Isaac said reports of bear sightings or damage could have been made on the DNR hotline and not been referred to him.

Schwabenlender noted the lakefront is filled with wooded areas and ravines where a bear could roam without being seen.

Although he set up a trail camera, Schwabenlender said he hopes the bear doesn't return and destroy his other two beehives.

The possibility of a bear in the area conjures up images of a 250-pound black bear in a tree on Noridge Trail in Port Washington two years ago.

On June 3, 2010, a 3-year-old black bear wandered into Port Washington and climbed the tree, where it was eventually tranquilized. The bear, which became lodged in a crook in the tree, had to be pushed out, landing with a thud on the ground. It was released in northern Wisconsin.