



THE WILDLIFE CENTER OF VIRGINIA

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WILDLIFE CENTER OF VIRGINIA URGES PUBLIC TO “KEEP BEARS WILD”

What to do – and what *not* to do – if you see a bear cub this spring.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Waynesboro, Virginia – April 25, 2024 Last week, news publications across the country reported on a heartbreaking story – a group of people were captured on video [forcibly pulling young black bear cubs out of a tree](#) to take photos with them.

“It’s a really unfortunate situation,” shared Alex Wehrung, the Center’s Public Affairs Manager. “While we can’t be sure of the fate of these cubs in particular, they’re not the only examples of people interacting with young bears inappropriately – especially during this time of year.”

Pregnant sows (mother bears) typically give birth to cubs in December-February and remain in their winter dens until April or May. At that point in their growth and development, bear cubs are old enough to travel with their mothers outside the den, but will remain under their protective care for many more months.

“It can be a dangerous world out there for young bears. In addition to threats like predation from other animals and simply surviving the elements, bear cubs have to deal with things that are directly related to human activity, too. Den sites being disturbed or destroyed, vehicle collisions, free-roaming dogs that have been let off-leash, close encounters with humans, etc. These are very real threats from the sow’s perspective, and their protective instinct kicks in,” Wehrung described.

One of the first things sows teach their cubs is to climb a tree to avoid danger. If a sow is nervous, she’ll send her cub(s) up a tree and will leave the area until the danger has passed; she’ll then return to gather her cub(s), typically at dusk or after dark.

If you encounter a bear cub by itself this spring, don’t pick it up. Instead, leave the area and check back the following day to see if the cub is still present. Give the sow plenty of time to

come back and collect her cub; don't be a bear-napper, and never harass wildlife of any kind for the sake of a photo. If you do see the cub the following day, or if you find an obviously injured cub, call the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources or your state wildlife agency.

It's important that we all do our part to keep bears wild. The following are things the Center urges the public *not* to do:

- **Never feed a bear** – not only is it illegal, but a fed bear will lose its natural wariness of humans, and can quickly become a nuisance bear.
- **Never take a bear cub home** – if you encounter a cub that could be orphaned or injured, call the Department of Wildlife Resources immediately. We can successfully rehabilitate bears, but keeping bears wild means minimizing human contact, and never treating them like a pet.
- **Don't run, if you encounter a Black Bear in the wild.** Announce your presence and calmly leave the area.

For more information on coexisting with wild Black Bears and what to do if you find a cub this spring, visit the Center's [Bears as Neighbors](#) page online.

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The Wildlife Center of Virginia is an internationally acclaimed teaching and research hospital for wildlife and conservation medicine. The nonprofit Center has cared for more than 95,000 wild animals, representing 200 species of native birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. The Center's public education programs share insights gained through the care of injured and orphaned wildlife, in hopes of reducing human damage to wildlife.