

# The unintended consequences of accidentally feeding bears



**Your Turn**  
Frances Figart  
Guest columnist

Black bear populations are on the rise in our region—and so are human ones. The intersection of the two living together in ever increasing areas of development is what biologists call the human-bear conflict zone.

“I love watching the bear family wander through our yard,” says Nina Ellis Snoddy of Asheville’s Chunn’s Cove. “There are times when I have been close enough – like when one was going through our outdoor refrigerator – I could see his eyes. I wanted to scare him away, but when we looked at each other, I said out loud; ‘I wish I could hug you.’”

Living near bears stirs emotions ranging from fear and frustration to excitement and even joy. It’s tempting to want to build relationships with these wild creatures. But the bottom line is, whether you are visiting Great Smoky Mountains National Park or have *Ursus americanus* meandering through your neighborhood, living near bears is a human privilege that brings with it great responsibility.

Bears are opportunists; they eat what is readily available. Imagine what a temptation the bratwurst and beer in your patio refrigerator would become if your sense of smell was magnified one hundred times.

“To get the 20,000 calories a day needed while fattening up before hibernation, a bear would need to eat 672 acorns, 78 pounds of blueberries, nearly 25,000 tent caterpillars or ONE 7-pound birdfeeder filled with black oil sunflower seeds,” writes Linda Masterson in her “Living with Bears Handbook,” pointing out how much easier it is for bears to survive if we are providing the buffet.

A fed bear is a dead bear  
Masterson explains that “if a bear has a positive experience (getting a food reward) without any negative consequences (being yelled at and chased off), it will try for what its enterprising bear-brain thinks might be an even bigger reward.”

It’s easy and even fun to shrug off the occasional bear getting into our garbage or birdfeeder, but Masterson cautions that ignoring the first offense is just leaving us wide open for escalated issues.

What happens to bears that get used to being around people – and start to expect the reward of our human food? One of the ways bear biologists try to address the issue is to relocate the bear. Another option, one they detest but often have to take, is to euthanize the bear. To put it bluntly, either way most are eventually killed.

“Some believe that when bears are moved, they go off to a happy new home,” says Bill Stiver, supervisory biologist in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. “In reality, many come back

and create conflict; and even more die on roads trying to get back to familiar territory.”

So, no matter what happens, “where bears and humans converge, bears nearly always lose,” writes science and nature journalist David Brill in “Point of Conflict,” an article in *Smokies Life* magazine. “The most troubling reality of the killing of bears involved in conflict is that the actions that led to the tragic outcome nearly always can be ascribed to the behavior of humans, not bears.”

Time to adapt  
If we love seeing our black bears healthy, value their wild nature, and do not want to see them die, it’s time for us to get back to these six BearWise Basics:

- Never feed or approach bears
- Secure food, garbage and recycling
- Remove bird feeders when bears are active
- Never leave pet food outdoors
- Clean and store grills
- Alert neighbors to bear activity

“Bears are a wildlife success story and part of the fabric of North Carolina,” says Colleen Olfenbuttel, black bear and furbearer biologist with North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. “Hopefully, people will learn to adapt and live responsibly with bears, as bears have shown they can adapt to living with us.”

**Resources for learning more**

- Get all the BearWise Basics at bear-



**A family of black bears sniffs around securely fastened trash dumpsters.**  
COURTESY PHOTO/ IMAGE BY DAVID BRILL

wise.org.

■ “Living with Bears Handbook” (Expanded 2nd edition, 2016) by Linda Masterson.

■ Become a BearWise certified community: [ncwildlife.org/bearwise](http://ncwildlife.org/bearwise).

■ If you have a significant bear observation to report, contact the NC Wildlife Resources Commission Wildlife Helpline at 866.318.2401 or [hwi@ncwildlife.org](mailto:hwi@ncwildlife.org).

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**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

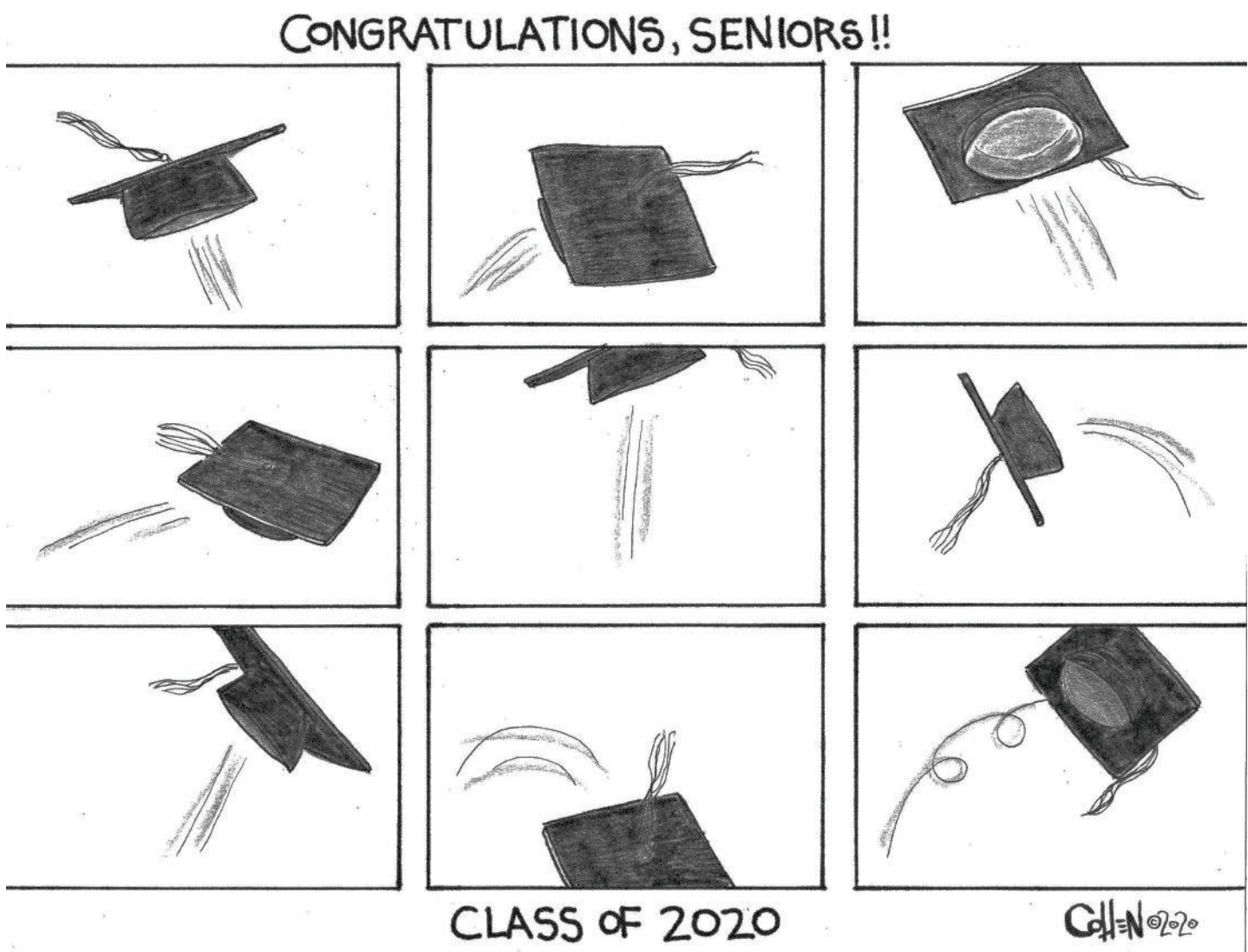
**Are you that obtuse?**

In the famed *Shawshank Redemption* movie, prisoner Andy Dufresne, when presenting promising evidence of his innocence to Warden Norton, asks him in frustration: “Are you that obtuse?” I pose this same question, in frustration, to Trump’s supporters. After his delaying early pandemic action for over a month; and passing the buck to governors, causing all fifty to bid against each other for vital protective equipment; and blaming everyone but himself for problems; and spreading so much false information while muzzling the experts... how is it that so many of you still think he is doing a good job of leadership in this deadly crisis? Are you really that obtuse? Wake up and smell the reality!  
*Stuart Smolkin, Asheville*

**The ballot box shouldn’t be a health risk**

In Response to “Voting to start in Asheville, WNC congressional runoff after coronavirus delay,” COVID-19 has upended every aspect of American life the past two months – including our elections. In the middle of primary season we have seen what voting is like during a global pandemic. Wisconsin’s April primary carried on despite the governor’s effort to delay it. The results were expected: more people contracted COVID-19. The Wisconsin primary was a harbinger for all remaining elections in 2020 – they are too dangerous to be held in person.

Unlike Wisconsin, the second GOP primary for the 11th district was delayed to June 23rd because of COVID-19. Absentee ballots for the election began being mailed out May 8. This election is a test for what’s ahead, and it’s clear that North Carolina must expand vote-by-mail. Unfortunately, NC Senate Leader Berger and Speaker Moore have dis-



missed recommendations to make voting safer and easier this fall.

As an organizer with NextGen North Carolina, I talk to young North Carolinians every day who want our elected officials to represent their needs and concerns. Young people are motivated to vote in November, but nobody should have to choose between their health and their right to vote. Call upon your representatives to take immediate action to prepare for the November election.  
*Max Wimer, Weaverville*

**We’re gonna need a bigger boat**

Sorry but it is one of the best lines in movie history. The other day it occurred to me that there’s an interesting parallel with today’s virus pandemic and the book/movie *Jaws*. You remember. The mayor of fictional Amity Island, Larry Vaughn, slightly greedy, convincing everyone to enjoy the beaches and ocean while a killer shark lurks in the local waters. His goal was to keep the tourist dollars flowing into his small town with a general disregard for protecting the public. Meanwhile, Chief Martin Brody, not convinced the shark threat is gone, promotes caution, urging people not to go in the water. Spoiler alert, but most of know what happens. In the end Chief Brody, along with marine scientist Matt Hooper, save the day with their level headedness and sound logic, killing the shark and making the waters safe again. Fill in these character names with cur-

rent science experts and political leaders. I’m all for everyone returning to work and getting back to as close as old normal as possible. But let the Chief Brodys and Matt Hoopers of our country do their jobs. It’ll be safe to get in the water soon.  
*Chris Kimmey, Weaverville*

**Acknowledge progress**

Recently most letters on these pages have addressed corona virus arrival here and around the world. Most were critical, expressing strong dissatisfaction with the leadership of our president/administration.

Wanting an informed opinion from a medical person in a virus rampant area, last week I talked with someone who has her Masters in Community Health Nursing and PhD in Nursing Research. She’s taught, written text books, and done research. She’s working from her condo in the New Jersey viral hotbed, with no direct contact with virus patients but interfacing daily with nurses who do. My question to her: “What do you think of the way the president has handled this situation?”

Her response: “I don’t know what else he could have done.”

“And what about the problem of not being equipped for this disaster?”

“There’s plenty of blame to go around.”

Hindsight is always better than foresight. Compliments, encouragement,

thoughts and prayers (yes) during a crisis are great helps. Armchair criticisms aren’t. Some people will never give this president credit for any accomplishments. If someone else had his job I’d be losing sleep. Instead he and his team are. Thank you.

My thanks to writers Leo Coffee and Janie M. Bowers for your words - good goals.  
*Gail M. Harding, Candler*

**Religious freedom?**

I am so tired of the conservative religious folks whining about persecution because they can’t gather in groups these days. In this country you can hold whatever religious belief you want, but for now you just have to do it at home. If you need to be surrounded by lots of others while performing some ritual, I think your faith is a little weak. My religion allows me to pray just fine even if I’m in my own house, in my own bathroom, sitting on my toilet.

These people need to get a grip on reality, and realize that the democracy that allows them to worship at all is under a pretty grave threat from the conservatively religious — those that seem to want a theocracy instead. Look around the world and see how that works.

Lock them in their churches if that’s where they want to be, and keep them from putting the rest of us at risk.  
*Lana Burns, Asheville*

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