

# BEAR DAMAGES ACTON BEEHIVES

HERB GARBUTT  
hgarbutt@metroland.com

Ray Lavender has had to deal with predators around his beehives before.

Usually skunks are the main culprit. But when he recently went to check on the three hives near his house just north of Acton, he knew it was not the work of skunks. The hives had been knocked over, one of them smashed to pieces and all had large claw marks on them.

Seeing the damage, Lavender knew he had been visited by a bear.

The Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry says almost all of Ontario has habitat to support black bears, though they are less common in southern Ontario. Since the beginning of 2021, the ministry's Bear Wise reporting line has had 35 re-

ports of bear sightings in the Guelph District, including 10 in the rural area around Acton and Rockwood.

Lavender has since installed a camera, "but I still haven't seen him." He also installed an electric fence around his hives, which he suspects is acting as a deterrent. It is located about 100 to 150 metres from his house.

Of his three hives, which house between 15,000 and 50,000 bees, one was destroyed. He is trying to salvage the second one and he was able to repair the third. Lavender said he has applied to a Ministry of the Environment program that refunds beekeepers if their hives are damaged by wildlife.

It is believed the bear was a single young male. The ministry said sightings are more common, beginning around April.

"Bears emerge from their dens and are seeking out food sources and young bears are dispersing from family groups," a statement from the ministry said. "Bears may also be seen more frequently during periods of natural food shortages, such as droughts or late frosts that affect berry and other natural food crops."

While adult female bears tend to stay in a 15-25 square kilometre area, males could have a home range that is 10 times that size. An individual bear might travel as far as 100 kilometres to a known food source.

While bears usually try to avoid people, they will be attracted to homes with strong food aromas, the smell of garbage, cooking smells, bird feeders, ripe fruit or pet food left outside. They will return as long as the food source is



Ray Lavender photo

Ray Lavender's beehives were visited by a bear that caused extensive damage.

available.

If you encounter a bear, slowly back away while watching and waiting for it to leave. If you are near a car or building, get inside. After the bear leaves, re-

move whatever attracted it.

The Bear Wise reporting line—1-866-514-2327 or TTY: 705-945-7641—operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week from April to

November.

Staff can provide information about bear behaviour, how to avoid human-bear interactions and how to avoid attracting bears to your property.

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