

Black bear gets a new home at Charles Towne Landing

Memphis the bear spent years tied to a tree

By Paul Bowers [Follow @paul_bowers](#)

For years, Memphis the black bear was trapped in a backyard in the Lowcountry. At first he was chained to a tree, and then he was placed in a five-by-twelve-foot chain-link cage.

"This is more common than people realize with these types of animals," says Michelle Reid, director of the nonprofit Animal Rescue & Relief. "And it doesn't necessarily have to be in the middle of nowhere." Several months ago, Animal Rescue & Relief took Memphis from that backyard, and now he has two acres to roam in an enclosure at Charles Towne Landing.

Reid won't say what town Memphis was found in, but she says it took about a year and a half to investigate the claims of animal abuse and get through the red tape to have him removed. When Reid and a co-worker finally went to the house with backup from local police, they removed the 450-pound bear and put him in a quarantine space. They gave him the name Memphis.

They also helped find him his new home in the Animal Forest at Charles Towne Landing on the banks of the Ashley River. "When he first was let loose into his habitat, he just took off," Reid says. "Tearing branches out of the trees, he jumped in the pond and swam around, and he just had a field day. Every day with him is like that because he's never had that."

Reid says that some people keep bears for bear baiting (also known as bear baying), a bloodsport in which hunting dogs are released into a cage to attack a bear, sometimes with its teeth and claws removed. The practice is still legal in South Carolina. But in the case of Memphis the bear, Reid says it looks like the owner was just keeping him as a pet. "It seems that a lot of times when people have these sorts of animals ... it's just not your average owner and your average pet," she says.

According to Reid, Memphis' owner will not face criminal charges. In February, state Sen. David Thomas (R-Greenville) sponsored the Exotic Animal and Reptile Control and Regulation Act, a bill that would require people to apply for a special permit and pay a \$150 annual fee to own any exotic animal — a term defined in the bill as including bears, hippos, camels, raccoons, opossums, lemurs, monkeys, beavers, and porcupines. The bill never made it past the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources, but Reid is holding out hope that another legislator will sign on to support the bill in next year's session.

"I'd hate for it to take somebody getting hurt for people to realize that we need those laws," Reid says.

In her 10 years leading the organization, which investigates animal abuse and neglect cases in North and South Carolina, Reid has encountered exotic animal auctions where people can purchase monkeys, tigers, and large reptiles. She has seen people keeping Alaskan wolves on their property for breeding, and she was involved with the seizure of 76 cats and dogs from a pet shelter in Williamsburg County, N.C., where *The Post and Courier* reported that cats had pus oozing from their eyes and dogs had feces in their cages.

If you are aware of a situation where an exotic animal is being mistreated, contact Animal Relief & Rescue via e-mail at arrinc@yahoo.com. Donations for the organization can be sent to PO Box 13477, Charleston, SC 29422.

Memphis can be seen every other day at Charles Towne Landing (1500 Old Towne Road) in the Animal Forest, where he and another male black bear named Tupelo take turns in the public viewing area. The Animal Forest is also home to elk, bison, river otters, mountain lions, brown pelicans, and egrets. The park is open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and admission is \$7.50 for adults, \$3.75 for S.C. senior citizens, \$3.50 for students age 6-15, and free for children age 5 and under.

Tags: bear, Charles Towne Landing, Animal Rescue & Relief, animals, wildlife, pets
