

Black Bears

Peacefully coexisting with Connecticut's remarkable native wildlife.



Overview

Connecticut's black bears are critical to the health of the ecosystem which sustains us. They open up forest canopies by breaking down branches while feeding, helping to propagate trees. This helps sunshine and seeds to reach the forest floor – increasing plant diversity. While grubbing for insects, bears break apart logs, which helps return nutrients to the soil. Female bears are slow to reproduce and only give birth to a few cubs every two to three years. Cubs stay with their moms until the second summer of their lives.

Bears need our protection now more than ever. In recent years, reports of bear-related incidents have fueled support for a hunting season. This is a poor solution for many reasons:

- it has been shown to actually increase human interactions,
- it ignores the fact that bear populations are self-regulating and
- it does not address the underlying causes, namely, that people have not been fully informed about how to live adjacent to bear populations. Connecticut residents and municipalities need to become “bear smart,” that is, learn how to peacefully coexist with this remarkable wild animal.

Understanding Bear Behavior

Living with bears means understanding their behaviors, yet all too often their behaviors are misunderstood, resulting in a dead bear and orphaned cubs. They are generally shy and curious – and use bluff behaviors to communicate.

These actions may include huffing, jaw popping, ground slapping or lunges, which is all too often misinterpreted as aggression. It's important not to confuse curiosity with aggression. For example, a person may fear a bear is approaching them to attack, when the bear is just curious about a foreign smell (human) in his environment. It's important to always stay away and let the bear wander back into the wild.

Bears Are Opportunistic Feeders

- Bears have a keen sense of smell – seven times better than that of a bloodhound! They can sniff out food items as much as two miles away. Because bears sleep during the coldest part of winter, they are out looking for food from early spring until early winter.
- Late summer and fall are when bears are most active because they need to fatten up before going into hibernation (bears are not true hibernators – they can wake up quickly to avoid danger, or if the opportunity exists during a mild winter, to exit the den to feed). During this active foraging period, bears will consume about 15,000 calories a day, gaining up to 40 pounds a week. Just one bird feeder full of black oil sunflower seeds or one garbage container overflowing with leftovers can reward a bear with a day's worth of calories for less than an hour's work.

Managing Human Behavior – Not Bears

- Irresponsible human behavior is deadly for black bears. When they are drawn to homes by easily-accessible food sources and other attractants, bears will begin spending more time in neighborhoods and start losing their fear of people (increasing the risk of interactions), possibly damaging property, and risk being hit and killed by cars.
- The Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) has the authority to kill a bear if there is a public health or safety threat. Farmers have remedies at their disposal if agricultural property is being damaged.
- Fortunately, there are many simple steps people can take to avoid a confrontation (see reverse side).



CONNECTICUT CHAPTER
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Simple Steps to Keep Bears Away

Get Rid of Attractants

- Put out garbage for pick up in the morning; do not leave out overnight unless it's in a bear-resistant trash can. Many trash haulers offer these containers.
- Keep garbage cans and outdoor grills clean, and use diluted ammonia to eliminate odors.
- If you're in an area where bears have been spotted, put away bird feeders from March through November. Adding a bird bath or providing nesting boxes will attract birds but not bears. Plant native shrubs and wildflowers – this will not only attract birds, but also help bees and other insects.
- Don't store food in an unlocked garage, flimsy shed or under decks.
- Put pet food in a sealed container if in a garage or shed, and do not feed pets outside.
- Never intentionally feed bears.
- Keep garbage in secure, airtight containers inside a garage, a shed or storage area.
- Electrified "unwelcome" mats can be used for chicken coops, and house and barn entry ways.
- Don't put meat scraps in compost.
- Use properly installed and maintained electrical fencing to protect beehives, chickens and livestock.
- Utilize electric fences, barriers and scent deterrents.

In the Community

- Urge your local municipality to proactively educate the public and, if necessary, pass ordinances that promote "bear smart" behavior.
- Share these bear tips with friends and neighbors.

Keep Pets and Other Animals Safe

- Dogs should be kept inside at night and supervised when outdoors. They should be leashed when walking or hiking. A roaming dog might be perceived as a threat to a bear or its cubs.
- Keep cats indoors – this will also help birds, since many birds are killed each year by cats.
- Secure small- and mid-sized livestock at night.

Additional Tips

- Do not put yourself between a mother bear with cubs.
- While hiking, carry bear bells and bear spray.
- If you encounter a bear outdoors, make your presence known by yelling or making loud noises, and back away.
- Never attempt to get close or be distracted by taking photos or video.
- If a bear approaches, shout, wave your arms and throw sticks or rocks. If a bear does not retreat, slowly leave the area. If you're at home, go into your house, garage or other structure.

Say "No" to a Bear Hunt

Bear hunting has been shown to increase human interactions, ignoring the fact that bear populations are self-regulating and not addressing the underlying cause, namely, that people have not been fully educated. Sierra Club opposes attempts to legalize bear hunting; instead, a comprehensive public educational program that teaches how to minimize bear interactions is strongly urged.

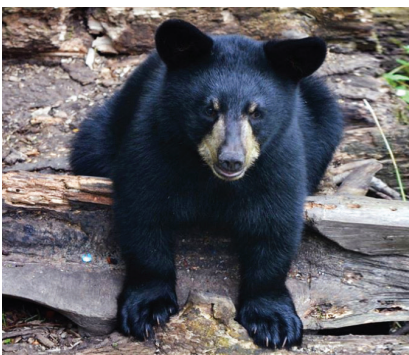


Photo: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Additional Resources

Bear Education Sources

- Connecticut Coalition to Protect Bears webinar: www.youtube.com/watch?v=30O7KQx8f0Y
- BearWise: www.bearwise.org
- Get Bear Smart Society: www.bearsmart.com

Bear-Resistant Products

- Bear Proof Bins: www.bearicuda.com
- Bear Spray: www.counterassault.com



Sierra Club Connecticut's Wildlife Committee is focused on the protection of our state's rich and remarkably diverse range of species, as well as migratory and international wildlife. To find out more, scan the QR code above or visit www.connecticut.sierraclub.org/wildlife.