

# Watch the picnic basket: Bear sightings surge in Connecticut

January 13 2017, by Dave Collins

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Keep an eye on the picnic basket. Bear sightings are surging across Connecticut.

The state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection says there were about 6,700 black bear sightings in 2016, a 49 percent increase over the previous year. Compare that to only about 450 sightings in 2000.

State wildlife biologist Paul Rego said black bear populations in Connecticut and other [states](#) have been increasing as land once used for farming has reverted back to forest. About 58 percent of the state is forest now, compared with 29 percent in 1860 when farming was hitting its peak and [black bears](#) had disappeared from Connecticut.

"Bears are responding to better habitat now," Rego said.

A count by the International Union for Conservation of Nature puts the number at about 850,000 to 950,000 black bears in North America. The population surge in Connecticut since the early 1980s—when bears returned to the state after more than a century—has prompted discussion of possible control measures, but no action is planned, Rego said. The state's had a few reports of bears being aggressive toward people over the years, but none has involved serious injuries.

Jeff Grody was working at his West Hartford home one July morning when he heard noises and went to investigate. What he found was

startling: a big black bear that had broken through a screen door and was in his den room.

"We've had bears in our yard lots of times. We like watching them," Grody said. "But that's a little too close."

The 60-year-old management consultant immediately closed the door to the den, went outside and called 911. The bear also seemed spooked by the encounter, leaving quickly before police arrived.

Mature black bears generally weigh around 200 to 250 pounds, but some in Connecticut have weighed in at nearly 600 pounds, Rego said. Some live more than 30 years. They breed every other year and typically have two to three cubs.

Most of the sightings in Connecticut last year were in the north-central and northwestern parts of the state. Avon reported the most with 602, followed by 501 in Farmington, 283 in Southbury, 280 in Simsbury and 268 in West Hartford and in Burlington.

Grody worries population [control measures](#) will be needed someday.

Bear hunting is illegal in Connecticut. For the time being, state officials urge residents to take precautions to not attract bears to their yards. The department advises property owners to remove bird feeders and other sources of food.

"Unfortunately at some point they will become a problem and they'll have to be addressed," he said. "It's too bad. We'll feel bad if we don't see the bears."

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