

More than 1,200 black bears are waking up in Connecticut. What to know about trash, pets and those ear tags

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Emerging from a long winter slumber, Connecticut's black bear population is on the move and hungry.

The state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection advises people to "be bear aware" to reduce potential conflicts with the large and powerful omnivores, which are rapidly expanding their numbers and range in the state.

How many bears are in the state now?

The estimate is 1,200, DEEP wildlife division Director Jenny Dickson said Friday. Many [bears](#) are reported in Litchfield and Hartford counties and fewer in eastern Connecticut, but bears have spread across the state, Dickson said.

Connecticut is good bear country. Natural foods such as acorns, skunk cabbage and grubs are abundant and bears' reproductive success and the survivorship of cubs are both high.

"Our bears are very healthy, they're very fit," Dickson said.

Bear sightings reported to DEEP last year totaled 8,600 in 156 of the state's 169 municipalities. There were 634 sightings in Avon, the most in the state; followed by Simsbury, 622; Farmington, 403; Granby, 372; and Bloomfield, 315. Hartford tallied 20 sightings, New Haven had 1 and Bridgeport had none, according to DEEP. Most communities with no reported sightings were in Eastern Connecticut, including Bozrah, Franklin, Chaplin and Sprague, but Dickson said that doesn't mean bears are not in those towns.

When will we have too many bears in Connecticut?

There are two ways to consider the question, Dickson said. Plenty of bear habitat remains, and the animals have been steadily spreading into eastern Connecticut.

But people will have to decide how many bears they can tolerate, Dickson said. A bear hunt has been debated, but so far, there is no season for [black bears](#) in the state.

Meanwhile, Dickson said, people must learn to live with bears and make necessary changes to dissuade the animals from getting too accustomed to people.

Why are bears in my neighborhood?

Bears that regularly eat food associated with humans, including birdseed, trash and pet food, get comfortable near people and associate neighborhoods and houses with tasty meals.

As the bear population continues to grow, the animals become increasingly food conditioned, and conflicts with humans will continue to increase. Food-conditioned bears pose a greater risk to public safety and often damage houses and cars and maim and kill pets and livestock. The danger that conditioned bears may be hit and killed by vehicles also increases.

"Black bears should never be fed—either intentionally or unintentionally. ... It is up to all of us to help prevent bears from learning bad behavior," Dickson said.

How do I keep bears away from my home?

Take down, clean, and put away birdfeeders by late March, or even earlier during mild weather. Store the feeders until late fall and clean up seed spilled on the ground. Store unused bird seed and suet in places not accessible to bears, such as a closed garage. Do not store bird seed in screened porches or sheds where bears can rip screens or break through

windows.

Store garbage in secure, airtight containers inside a garage or other enclosed storage area. Adding ammonia to trash cans and bags reduces odors that attract bears. Periodically clean garbage cans with ammonia to reduce residual odor. Garbage for pickup should be put outside the morning of collection, not the night before.

Don't store recyclables in a porch or screened sunroom as bears can smell these items and will rip screens to get at them. Also, keep barbecue grills clean and store grills inside a garage or shed.

What about pets and livestock?

A bear might perceive a roaming dog as a threat to itself or cubs. Supervise dogs when outside and keep your dog on a short leash when walking and hiking.

Use electric fencing to protect chickens, other livestock, beehives, agricultural crops, and berry bushes. Also, avoid placing meat scraps or sweet foods, such as fruit and fruit peels, in compost piles.

What if I encounter a bear?

In case of a close encounter with a bear, make your presence known by yelling or making other loud noises. Never attempt to get closer to a bear. If the animal does not retreat, slowly leave the area. If you're in your yard, go into your house, garage, or other structure.

If the bear persistently approaches, go on the offensive—shout, wave your arms, and throw sticks or rocks.

When should I report a bear sighting?

Bear sightings reported by the public provide valuable information to help DEEP monitor changes in the population. Anyone who observes a black bear in Connecticut is encouraged to report the sighting at portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Wildlife/Report-a-Wildlife-Sighting, or send an email to deep.wildlife@ct.gov.

Information on the presence or absence of ear tags, including tag color and numbers, is particularly valuable. A common misconception is that a tagged bear is a problem bear, and a bear with two ear tags was caught on two different occasions because it was causing problems. Every bear receives two ear tags (one in each ear) the first time it is handled by DEEP biologists. Most tagged bears have not been caught as problem bears, but rather as part of a project researching the state's bear population.

In the rare instance when a bear appears to be aggressive toward people, or other immediate [public safety](#) concerns involving a bear, contact DEEP's Environmental Conservation Police at 860-424-3333.

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