

Monroe Police Department

Animal Care and Control Unit



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BLACK BEAR
Ursus americanus



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Black bears live in woodland habitats.

Background Information

Black bears are impressive animals. Even a long-distance glimpse of one foraging in a woodland is an unforgettable experience for most outdoor enthusiasts. However, glimpsing a bear in Connecticut was once unlikely because bears were extirpated from the state by the mid-1800s. Since then, bears have made a comeback. Their return is due, in part, to the regrowth of forestland throughout the region following the abandonment of farms during the late 1800s. Beginning in the 1980s, the DEP Wildlife Division had evidence of a resident population. Since then, annual sighting reports have increased dramatically, indicating a rapid increase in the bear population. With the number of bears increasing in the state, it is important for residents to learn the facts about black bears and how to coexist with them.

Description

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The black bear is a stocky animal with short, thick legs. It is the smallest North American bear. In Connecticut, adult males, or boars, normally weigh from 150 to 400 pounds, while females, or sows, weigh from 110 to 200 pounds. Yearlings weigh 45 to 100 pounds. Adults are five to six feet long.

The black bear's coat is typically glossy black or brownish black, except for the muzzle, which is tan. There is sometimes a small, white patch on the chest. In western North America some black bears are brown or cinnamon. Black bears have five toes with large claws on all feet. Bear tracks resemble human tracks, but the front feet are shorter than the rear. A bear's tail is short, from three to five inches long. The sexes are similar in appearance, although males are usually larger.



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Black bears are excellent tree climbers.

Habitat and Diet

Black bear habitat is forestland, usually with deciduous and coniferous trees, as well as streams, swamps, and rock ledges. Bears prefer areas with thick understory vegetation and abundant food resources. Mature forests provide soft and hard mast in late summer and fall. Wetlands are particularly important in spring when emerging plants are one of the few available foods. Bears are omnivorous; they eat grasses, forbs, fruits, nuts, and berries. They also will seek insects (particularly ants and bees), scavenge carrion, and raid bird feeders and garbage cans. Bears occasionally will prey on small mammals, deer, and livestock.

Life History

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Breeding occurs during summer, usually in late June or early July. During this time, males travel extensively in search of females. The age when sows first produce cubs is related to the available food supply, but most begin to reproduce at age three or four and continue to have young every two years. Bears do not form long-lasting bonds, so the males may mate with more than one female during the breeding season. Fighting may occur between rival males as well as between males and unreceptive females.

Young are born in the den during January or February and are blind, toothless, and covered with fine hair. Cubs weigh six to 12 ounces at birth. Litter sizes range from one to four cubs, with litters of two or three being most common. After giving birth, the sow usually continues her winter rest while the cubs are awake and nursing. Only females rear the young. Cubs are weaned when they are about seven months old and will remain with the female until the second summer of their lives. Then, the young bears, especially the males, may travel great distances in search of their own territories. Yearling females frequently settle near their mother's home range. Young bears are often forced into less preferred habitat.

Interesting Facts

The black bear is an intelligent animal with keen senses of smell and hearing. It can detect the slightest aroma of food, which may lead the bear to campsites and near homes. Odor from carelessly stored food and garbage can lure bears long distances. Black bears travel and feed primarily at night, but can be active any time of the day. Climatic factors, such as drought, may result in a food shortage, causing bears to travel many miles in search of food.

Black bears are generally shy and secretive and usually fearful of humans. However, if they regularly find food near houses and areas of human activity, they can lose their fear of humans. Unlike grizzly bears, black bears are seldom aggressive toward humans.

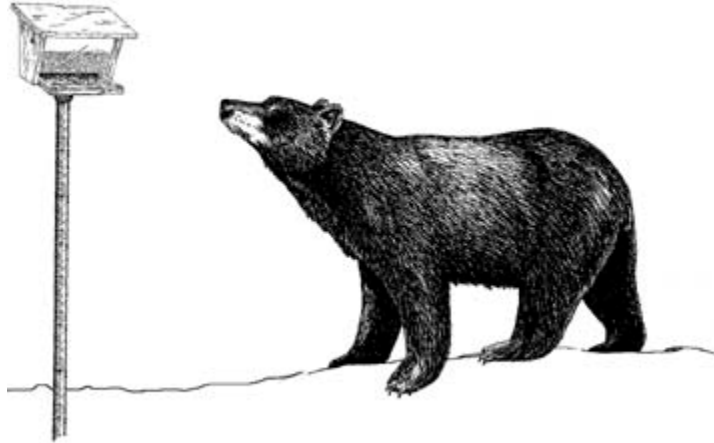
Females with cubs tend to have restricted home ranges which average six to 19 square miles, while males move about widely in home ranges of 12 to 60 square miles. The size of a home range varies geographically and often depends on the quality of habitat. Most ranges are used by more than one bear, but specific areas are rarely used at the same time. Male and female ranges can overlap, but overlap among the same sex is less common. In their home territories, bears may mark trees (called "bear trees") along their travel routes by clawing and biting the bark. Black bears are good tree climbers and strong swimmers. They also can run up to 35 miles per hour.

Black bears are not classified as true hibernators but their body temperature is lowered and heart rate slowed during winter denning. Denning enables bears to overcome unfavorable weather conditions and lack of food during winter. Denning bears do not eat, drink, urinate, or defecate. However, they will usually wake up if disturbed during their winter dormancy. Bears commonly den under fallen trees or in brush piles, but varied sites are used, including rocky ledges. Most dens are lined

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with leaves, grass, or rotted wood. In Connecticut, most bears den from late November through mid-March. Some individuals den for shorter periods.



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Black bears frequently destroy bird feeders in their quest for an easy meal.

Bear Management

As Connecticut's bear population continues to increase, more bears, particularly young bears, will be seen near residential areas. The DEP's response will depend on the specifics of each bear situation. The mere presence of a bear does not necessitate its removal. In most cases, if left alone, the bear will make its way to a more natural habitat. Removing food attractants, such as bird feeders, reduces the chance that bears will go near homes. The DEP seldom relocates bears. An exception is the removal of a bear from an urban location when there is little likelihood that it can leave safely on its own and when the bear is in a position where it can be safely immobilized. DEP Tranquilizing Teams, consisting of Environmental Conservation Police Officers and wildlife biologists, are trained and equipped to immobilize wildlife. Bears cannot be relocated to another state because no other state allows it. Bears that have persistent, serious, negative behavior, such as killing protected livestock or entering buildings, may have to be destroyed.

As bears become more regular residents of Connecticut towns, it is important that people learn to adapt to the presence of bears and take measures to avoid damage and problems. **If people do not take precautions, problem behavior by bears can increase, possibly leading to bears being removed or destroyed.**

Living with Bears

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Much of Connecticut's landscape is now forested and is suitable for black bears. The rapid increase in the bear population between the 1980s and early 2000s is expected to continue. As the bear population expands, interactions between humans and bears will increase. People should learn what to do if they see a bear and how to avoid unnecessary conflicts by keeping food away from bears.

If you see a bear:

- *Enjoy it from a distance.*
- *Advertise your presence by shouting and waving your arms or walk slowly away.*
- *Never attempt to feed or attract bears.*
- *[Report bear sightings](#) to the Wildlife Division, at (860) 675-8130.*

Bears near your home

In wilderness settings bears usually avoid people. But food attractants near homes can cause them to grow habituated to humans and disturbances, such as dogs and other noises. Bears are attracted by bird feeders, garbage, outdoor pet food, compost piles, fruit trees, and berry-producing shrubs.

To avoid attracting bears:

- Remove bird feeders from late March through November. If a bear visits a bird feeder in winter, remove the feeder.
- Add a few capfuls of ammonia to trash bags and garbage cans to mask food odors. Keep trash bags in a container with a tight lid and store in a garage or shed. Wait until the morning of collection before bringing out trash.
- Do not leave pet food outside overnight and store livestock food in airtight containers.
- Do not put meats or sweet-smelling fruit rinds in compost piles. Lime can be sprinkled on the compost pile to reduce the smell and discourage bears.
- Thoroughly clean grills after use.
- Never intentionally feed bears. Bears that associate food with people may become aggressive and dangerous. This may lead to personal injury, property damage, and the need to destroy problem animals.
- Encourage your neighbors to take similar precautions.

If you see a bear on your property you can either leave the bear alone and wait for it to leave or make loud noises from a safe distance to attempt to scare the bear away.

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Bears seen while hiking or camping

Black bear attacks on humans are exceptionally rare. In most hiking areas, bears normally leave once they have sensed a human. However, at campsites and campgrounds bears can be attracted by poorly stored food and garbage. If you see a bear when hiking or camping, make your presence known by making noise and waving your arms. If you surprise a bear at close range, walk away slowly while facing the bear. Avoid direct eye contact and do not run. Try to stay calm as you make your retreat. Black bears will sometimes "bluff charge" to within a few feet of you when they feel threatened. If this happens, stand your ground and shout at the bear. Do not climb a tree because black bears are excellent tree climbers. Make sure your dog is on a leash and under control.

Sometimes bears are attracted to food that is prepared outside. Do not cook near your tent or store food inside your tent. Instead, keep your food in a vehicle or use a rope to suspend it 10 or more feet off the ground and at least six feet away from tree trunks. Even clothes that you have cooked in should be stored out of a bear's reach.

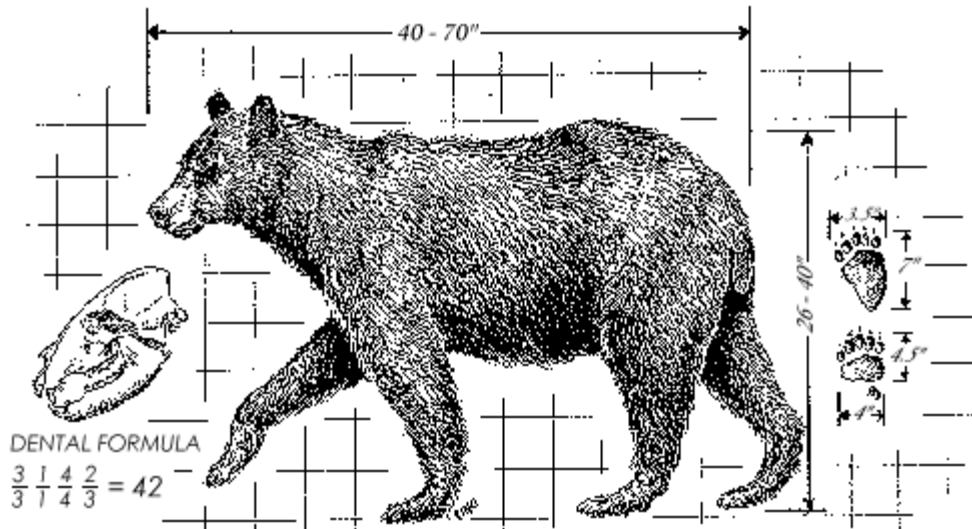
Bears, livestock, pets, and beehives

Bears occasionally attack livestock and damage beehives. Livestock can be protected with electric fencing or by moving them into a secure building at night. Store livestock and pet foods in airtight containers and clean up any spilled feed. Bears may attack sheep, goats, pigs, fowl, and llamas. Attacks on horses and cattle are less common. Bears rarely harm cats or dogs. However, they will go after pet rabbits in outdoor hutches. Beehives also can be protected with electric fencing or with reinforced wire and metal strapping.



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Blueprint for a Black Bear



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Weight: Males, normally 150-400 lbs.; females, 110-200 lbs.; yearlings, 45 -100 lbs.

Body Characteristics: Stocky, with short, thick legs.

Color: Varies in color from black to brown; tan around the muzzle and occasionally has a white chest patch.

Locomotion: Plantigrade (walks on whole foot). Usually walks with a shuffling gait but can run at speeds of over 30 mph. Agile climber.

Senses: Exceptional hearing and smell, poorer sight.

Diet: Grasses, forbs, fruit, nuts, and berries. Occasionally preys on small mammals, rarely deer and livestock. Also seeks insects (ants, bees), scavenges carrion, and raids garbage cans and bird feeders.

Habitat: Mixed deciduous-coniferous forests with mast-producing overstories and understories, marshes, and thickets.

Social Behavior: Breeding occurs in early summer. Males may breed with several females, but are solitary in the non-breeding season. Females give birth while denning, usually in January. Cubs remain with the female for 1 1/2 years. Adult females breed every other year, less often in poorer habitat. Bears are most active at night. Often avoid humans but can be habituated by food sources found near homes.

Connecticut Population: Increasing. The resident population is estimated to be in the hundreds. The majority of the population inhabits northwestern Connecticut. Additional nonresident yearlings wander to and from western Massachusetts.

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**Black Bear
Do's and Don'ts**

In recent years, a resident population has become established in Connecticut, primarily in the northwestern region. Bears have also wandered into heavily populated residential areas. Connecticut residents need to learn more about bears and how to reduce the likelihood of bears becoming a problem.

BEARS NEAR YOUR HOME

Bears are attracted to the garbage, pet food, compost piles, fruit trees and birdfeeders around houses.

DO make birdfeeders and bird food inaccessible by discontinuing the feeding of birds from late March through November or by hanging feeders at least ten feet above the ground and six feet away from tree trunks.

DO eliminate food attractants by placing garbage cans inside a garage or shed. Add ammonia to trash to make it unpalatable.

DO clean and store grills away after use.

DON'T intentionally feed bears. Bears that become accustomed to finding food near your home may become "problem" bears.

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DON'T leave pet food outside overnight.

DON'T add meat or sweets to a compost pile.

BEARS SEEN WHEN HIKING OR CAMPING

Bears normally leave an area once they've sensed a human. If you see a bear, enjoy it from a distance. Aggression by bears towards humans is exceptionally rare.

DO make your presence known by making noise and waving your arms if you see a bear while hiking.

DO keep dogs on a leash and under control. A roaming dog might be perceived as a threat to a bear or its cubs.

DO walk away slowly if you surprise a bear nearby.

DON'T cook food near your tent or store food inside your tent. Instead, keep food in a secure vehicle or use rope to suspend it between two trees.

DON'T climb a tree, but wait in a vehicle or building for the bear to leave an area.

BEARS, LIVESTOCK AND BEEHIVES

Bears occasionally attack livestock and damage beehives.

DO protect livestock with electric fencing and move livestock into barns at night if possible.

DO reinforce beehives to prevent them from being knocked over or protect them with electric fencing.

Do not feed wildlife. Food placed outside for wildlife, such as corn for squirrels or deer, may attract bears. Reconsider putting squash, pumpkins, corn stalks or other Halloween or holiday decorations outside that also may attract bears. Even bird feeders can become "bear magnets." Tips for how to safely feed birds for those in prime bear areas include: restrict feeding season to when bears den, which is primarily from late November through late March; avoid foods that are particularly attractive for bears, such as sunflower seeds, hummingbird nectar mixes or suet; bring feeders inside at night; or suspend feeders from high crosswires.

- o **Keep it clean.** Don't place garbage outside until pick-up day; don't throw table scraps out back for animals to eat; don't add fruit or vegetable wastes to your compost pile; and thoroughly clean your barbecue grill after every use. If you feed pets outdoors, consider placing food dishes inside overnight. Encourage your neighbors to do the same.

Keep your distance. If a bear shows up in your backyard, stay calm. From a safe distance, shout at it like you would to chase an unwanted dog. If the bear won't leave, slowly retreat and call the nearest Game Commission regional office or local police department for assistance.

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- **Eliminate temptation.** Bears that visit your area are often drawn there. Neighbors need to work together to reduce an area's appeal to bears. Ask area businesses to keep dumpsters closed and bear-proofed (chained or locked shut).

- **Check please!** If your dog is barking, or cat is clawing at the door to get in, try to determine what has alarmed your pet. But do it cautiously, using outside lights to full advantage and from a safe position, such as a porch or an upstairs window. All unrecognizable outside noises and disturbances should be checked, but don't do it on foot with a flashlight. Black bears blend in too well with nighttime surroundings providing the chance for a close encounter. If bears have been sighted near your home, it is a good practice to turn on a light and check the backyard before taking pets out at night. "Ideally, we want bears to pass by residential areas without finding a food reward that would cause them to return and become a problem,"

- **Stay Calm.** If you see a bear and it hasn't seen you, leave the area calmly. Talk to the bear while moving away to help it discover your presence. Choose a route that will not intersect with the bear if it is moving.

- **Get Back.** If you have surprised a bear, slowly back away while quietly talking. Face the bear, but avoid direct eye contact. Do not turn and run; rapid movement may be perceived as danger to a bear that is already feeling threatened.

- **Avoid blocking** the bear's only escape route and try to move away from any cubs you see or hear. Do not attempt to climb a tree. A female bear can falsely interpret this as an attempt to get at her cubs, even though the cubs may be in a different tree. Pay Attention. If a bear is displaying signs of nervousness or discomfort with your presence, such as pacing, swinging its head, or popping its jaws, leave the area. Some bears may bluff charge to within a few feet. If this occurs, stand your ground, wave your arms wildly, and shout at the bear. Turning and running could elicit a chase and you cannot outrun a bear. Bears that appear to be stalking should be confronted and made aware of your willingness to defend by waving your arms and yelling while you continue to back away.

- **Fight Back.** If a bear attacks, fight back as you continue to leave the area. Bears have been driven away with rocks, sticks, binoculars, car keys, or even bare hands.

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- **DO** report bear sightings to the DEP



- Experience has shown that a single wandering bear can be responsible for numerous sightings reported to the Wildlife Division. Experience has also shown that, given an avenue for escape, bears will usually wander back into more secluded areas. People should not feed bears, either intentionally or unintentionally. Bears that associate food with people become problem bears that will not be tolerated by all property owners. Connecticut has the habitat to support more bears; however, the future of Connecticut's bear population depends on the actions and attitudes of the human population.
- The probability of a bear attacking a human is exceptionally low. Therefore, the mere presence of a bear does not necessitate its removal. However, the DEP may attempt to remove bears from urban locations when there is little likelihood that they will leave on their own and when they are in positions where darting is feasible. The DEP attempts to monitor bear activity in developed areas in coordination with local public safety officials. Coordination and cooperation between DEP officials on the scene and local police officials is a key, critical ingredient in educating the public and assuring a safe, desirable outcome in such a situation.

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Black Bear Sighting Report Form (Fields marked with an asterisk (*) must be filled in.)

If you have seen a black bear in Connecticut, you can use the form below to report your sighting to the DEP's Wildlife Division. Internet web address: <http://www.depdata.ct.gov/wildlife/sighting/bearrpt.htm>

DEP-Wildlife Division 860-675-8130, between the hours of 8:30am and 4:30pm.

If you need immediate assistance concerning a black bear, you should call DEP's 24-hour hotline at 860-424-3333.

Date of Observation* _____ Time of Observation _____

Town where bear was observed * _____

Exact location * _____
(Street Address, closet intersection, or landmark)

How many bears did you see? _____

Did the bear have ear tags? _____ (Yes/ No or Not sure)

If you saw ear tags, briefly describe the color and any numbers/letters you could see on the tags. _____

Additional Comments _____

Please tell us how we can contact you if we need additional information.

Name, Address: * _____

Telephone * _____

E-mail _____

This completed form may be mailed to:

Connecticut DEEP-Wildlife Division, Sessions Woods WMA, P. O. Box 1550,
Burlington, CT 06013-1550