Be Bear Aware Series, by Killingworth Conservation Commission

Black Bears in Killingworth
By Katie Digianantonio

Black bears (*Ursus americanus*) have become an increasingly common presence in Killingworth, Connecticut, reflecting a broader trend across the state. Historically absent from Connecticut due to deforestation and hunting in the 1800s, black bears began returning in the 1980s as forests regenerated. Today, the state's bear population is estimated between 1,000 and 1,200 individuals, with sightings reported in nearly all of Connecticut's 169 towns.

In Killingworth, bear sightings have been on the rise. In 2019, residents reported 21 sightings, up from 18 in 2017. However, only 3 bear sightings in Killingworth were reported to DEEP in 2024. No sightings have been reported yet in 2025.

The growing bear population has led to more frequent human-bear interactions. In September 2019, a Killingworth family experienced a tragic incident when a bear attacked and killed their two pet goats.

Such events highlight the importance of adopting measures to coexist safely with bears.

To minimize conflicts, residents are advised to:

- **Secure attractants**: Store garbage in bear-resistant containers and remove bird feeders, especially during active bear seasons March thru November.
- **Protect livestock**: Use electric fencing to safeguard livestock and apiaries.
- **Report sightings**: Inform local authorities of bear sightings to aid in monitoring and management efforts.

Connecticut's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) continues to study the bear population and develop strategies to manage human-bear interactions effectively. By staying informed and implementing recommended practices, Killingworth residents can contribute to peaceful coexistence with the local black bear population. Check out CT DEEP's "The State of the Bears" online.

Bear Life Around Us
By Stephanie Warren

"Guess who I spotted in the woods behind the house," Mr. Black Bear said to his spouse. "I saw the creature on two legs who stays in the house. The two legged looked good, but not really too edible!"

What!! Live in Connecticut, and this can happen. Bears are moving into more developed areas as we humans (the two legged) develop more of what was the natural habitat for the bears, as well as many other wildlife species.

Did you know that August is the main bear mating season and that the Black bears can be more aggressive toward humans during that time if they feel potential danger.

Then, generally from September through October in preparation for "sleeping" during hibernation, bears will do extensive food hunts.

According to *Kids Britannica* (website link shown below) "Prior to winter sleep, bears must accumulate large quantities of body fat during late summer and fall. This enables them to survive the long period of winter fasting. It also allows them to have sufficient energy in spring when they emerge, and food is scarce. "They do calm down and then, as most of us know, settle into hibernation during the cold months."

Black bear cubs (called yearlings) are usually born between January and February, in the den where the mother bear is wintering. They'll stay with their mom until they are about a year and a half old, during which time they learn how to be self-sufficient and develop good survival skills.

Black bears are not generally spontaneously aggressive towards humans, but mom bears are always on alert for the safety of their cubs and can become aggressive if they think that the cubs are in danger. Avoid walking alone or in secluded, wooded areas. Carry bear

spray and use other precautions to ward off a bear that threatens you, as recommended in the DEEP website (listed below.).

Over decades, bears have become used to humans and can be seen in rather close proximity to houses (sometimes even on a porch or breaking into a house).

There are things that you can do to avoid "human caused conflicts with black bears" (DEEP Website)

Never feed bears. Keep trashcans inside a garage or other enclosed area.
Remove birdfeeders and bird food from March through November (DEEP)
You can find a full "*Be BearWise Checklist"* on the DEEP website.

A conservation goal is to help us learn how to live safely with the bears that also live in our area.

Website references:

https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/black-bear/317590

https://portal.ct.gov/deep/wildlife/living-with-black-bears

10 Tips to Bear-Proof Your Property
By Guy Vecchitto

Bears are becoming more prevalent in our State and local communities. To try and avoid possible problems with bears at your property; here are some tips I hope you will try.

1. Secure your trash (and keep the aromas at bay). Bears have an incredible sense of smell, so start by securing your trash cans in sturdy enclosures or bear- resistant containers. Make sure to clean the cans regularly to minimize tempting odors. If possible leave your garbage cans in an enclosed area such as a garage or storage shed.

2. Say no to bird buffets. A great way to feed the birds, and not the bears, is to attach bird feeders to a clothesline high enough from bears to reach; preferably 10 feet. It is also more convenient to fill the feeder from your deck, all you have to do is reel the feeder in to refill, then reel it back out and you're done. Also, consider using bear-resistant feeders or remove them during bear season.

3. Cleanup the barbecue. Make sure to clean the grill thoroughly, disposing of any leftover food or grease in a secure container. This practice will also keep other smaller critters from invading your grill.
4. Seal all home entry points. We don't want our home to become a Motel 6 for bears. Seal up gaps under decks and any other possible lodging areas before the "guests " arrive!
5. Say goodbye to fruity fragrances. Avoid leaving sweet-smelling items, such as ripe fruits or scented candles, near open windows.
6. Let there be light (and noise) Install motion-sensor lights around your property to deter bears from venturing too close. Similarly, loud noises like wind chimes can help keep them at bay.
7. Compost with care. Instead of a compost pile, opt for a compost bin with secure latches instead.
8. Build a garden fortress. Create a sturdy fence around your garden to discourage bears from munching on your veggies. Electric fences can also provide an effective barrier in certain situations.
9. Protect your car. When leaving your car make sure all the windows and sunroof are closed , and finally, lock the doors!
10. Use tree defense tactics. If you have fruit-bearing trees, consider using netting to protect the fruits. This also keeps unwanted smaller critters from stealing your fruit too! Prune branches that provide easy access for bears to climb and access your property. Installing an electric fence can also be an option to consider.

If you thought these tips were helpful; I hope you will spread the word! Share these bear-proofing tips with your neighbors, fostering a sense of community and ensuring everyone takes steps to keep our surroundings bear-friendly.