

# Are There Bears Living In Lyme?

## If They're Not Here Yet, They May Be Soon

By Mary Guitar

For the past several months, in hundreds of winter dens in our Connecticut forestlands, in hollow trees, rock outcroppings, holes in the ground or brush piles, female black bears (*Ursus americanus*) have been waking up from dormancy after nurs-



**First Selectman Ralph Eno teamed up with Lyme Openspace Coordinator Wendolyn Hill, who has skills in retouching digital photos, to illustrate how easy it is to introduce bears into the Lyme community.**

ing up to four blue-eyed cubs born in January and February.

The cubs' blue eyes will change to brown in the next year or two as the sows teach their young how to survive in Connecticut, a state that is experiencing a surge in bear populations.

There have been several reported sightings of bears in Lyme in recent months (only one confirmed), and two pictures purporting to provide conclusive evidence of bears in Lyme have even made the email and Facebook rounds in town – although many suspect they had been “retouched” to introduce bears into familiar local scenes.

Black bears are definitely making a comeback in the state, after having been extirpated almost 200 years ago, killed for food and to prevent raiding of human food crops and livestock.

Humans have always been fascinated by bears. While they are feared for their strength, we also feel a sense of kinship with these agile, intelligent animals that are able to walk upright as we do, that eat the same food as we do, and that also nurture and teach their helpless young.

Black bears, the smallest North American bear, range in size from 110 to 450 pounds. Black or brownish-black with a tan muzzle, they are slightly nearsighted, but their sense of smell is keen, in fact, seven times greater than a bloodhound's. Feeding at night, bears eat whatever is available, in-

cluding grass, fruit, nuts, berries, flowering plants, corn, honey, insects, carrion, bird seed, garbage, and small mammals.

A female with cubs may range only five to seven square miles in Connecticut while males can range up to ten times that area.

The latest statistics from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) list a total of 4,396 sightings statewide for the year, most of them in the northwest portion of the state. There was only one bear sighting in the past year in Lyme and two in Haddam. Paul Rego, a wildlife biologist working at DEEP, notes that sightings in the southerly part of the state increase every year. The current population estimate is between 500 and 1,000 for the state.

State officials are concerned about human-bear interactions, both as a matter of public safety and expense. The possibility of an annual bear hunt lottery has been considered but has not been implemented. While training problem bears to be more wary of people sometimes works, moving bears is often unsuccessful because they are likely to return to their original locations. Bears have adaptable natures, and are able to coexist safely with humans in most circumstances.

This article is from the Lyme Land Trust Newsletter Spring 2015

## Black Bears Are Usually Shy & Avoid Humans

### Here Are Some Tips On How To Keep Bears From Becoming Nuisances

Black bears are seldom aggressive apart from a female who feels her cubs are threatened.

They are usually shy and afraid of humans. Risk of serious injury from a bear is very low; there have been only a few human fatalities in the northeastern US since 1900.

However, contact with bears should be limited by eliminating their access to human food and livestock.

If bears are a consistent problem, bird

feeders should be removed between mid-April and late October. If you have a birdfeeder, keep the feeding area clean.

Livestock should be protected with electric fencing or secured in buildings at night. Beehives should be fenced.

Other bear attractants are compost piles, garbage cans, dumpsters and barbecue grills. Keep garbage cans covered. Add a few capfuls of ammonia to trash bags and cans as a deterrent. Keep pet and livestock food inside a

building. Don't put meat or fruit rinds in compost. Sprinkle lime on compost.

If you encounter a bear, make loud noises and wave your arms. Then walk away slowly while facing the bear. Keep dogs leashed. If a bear stands on its hind legs, it's not attacking; it may be trying to smell something. Frightened bears make loud blowing noises.

Report sightings to Wildlife Division: 860-675-8130