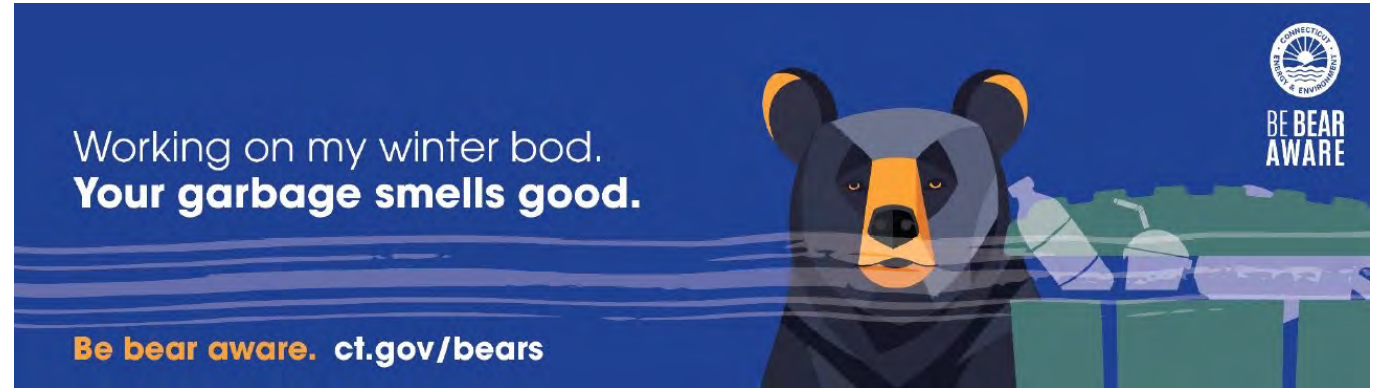# The State of the Bears

A Briefing on Bears in Connecticut
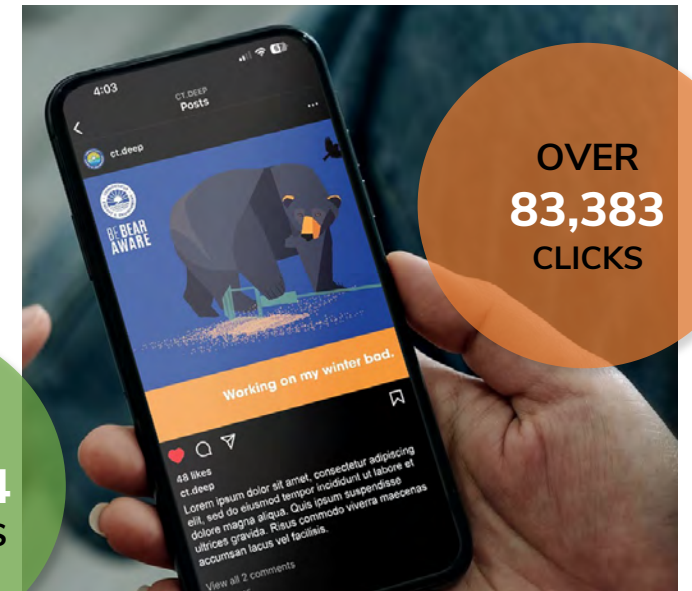
FEBRUARY 2024

Be Bear Aware Public Awareness Campaign

In 2023, DEEP significantly expanded its strategic outreach and education initiatives as one of the many tools the agency is utilizing to reduce human-bear conflicts. DEEP successfully launched the Fall 2023 *Be Bear Aware* campaign bringing key messages to a mass audience through traditional media like billboards and digital media including social media ads. This initiative was a testament to the power of informed action, focusing on reducing conflicts by addressing food habituation. As bears begin to emerge from hibernation, the *Be Bear Aware* campaign will ramp up to underscore the critical need for residents to do their part in keeping their communities and bears safe.

Working on my winter bod.
Your garbage smells good.

Be bear aware. ct.gov/bears

OVER
1,687,334
IMPRESSIONS

OVER
83,383
CLICKS

What DEEP is Doing Now

Education and Outreach

- Education programs with schools, numerous webinars, and in-person presentations in communities
- Video series: Living with Black Bears
- Working with legislators and communities to reduce bear-human conflicts
- Sightings, conflict data, and other helpful info shared on DEEP's website
- Public awareness campaigns throughout bears' active season

Media Engagement

- Members of the media have followed along as biologists work with bears
- Biologists share important information through these appearances
- Issue annual press releases during bears' active season, frequently make wildlife biologists available for interviews
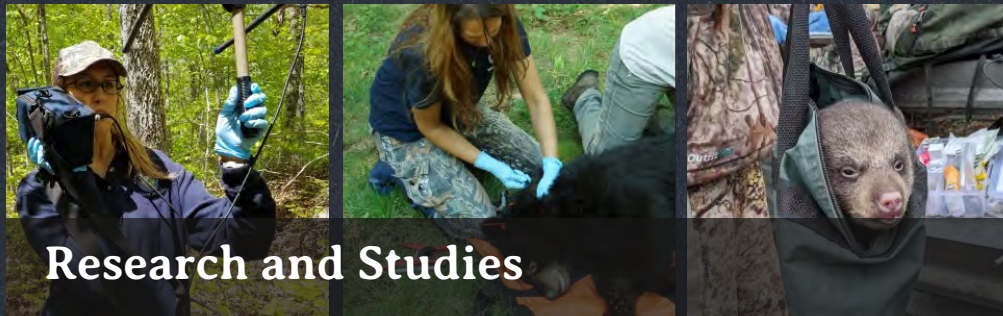
Scan to learn more about living with black bears.

Conflict Management

- Advice on bear denning near homes
- Bear traps set after damage
- Guidance on bears accessing bird feeders, trash
- Guidance for protecting agriculture and livestock
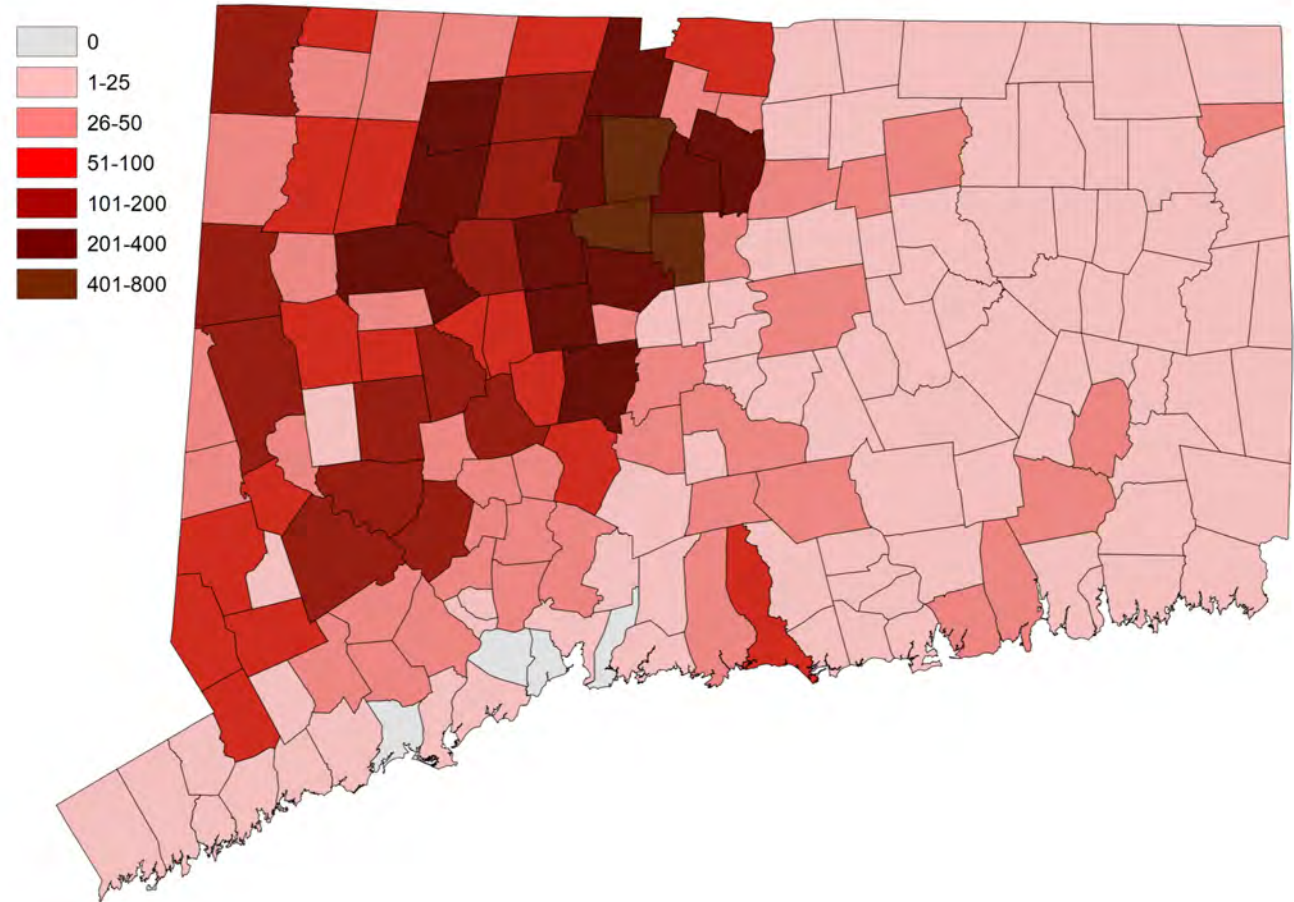
Research and Studies

- Winter den study
- Cubs/Reproduction
- Tagging bears
- Collaring bears (GPS data)
- Necropsies on dead bears

Bear Sightings

Public sightings of bears have been collected by the Wildlife Division since bears began returning to the State in the 1980's. Today, reports are used as a gauge of the population's distribution as well as a broad index of where bears are seen more often. Reports from the public can have a high degree of variability, particularly given the human population density and how novel bear sightings are to an area.

Bears have been spotted in every town in CT in recent years. In 2023, bears were reported from 165 of the State's 169 towns and cities.

SIGHTINGS **2023**

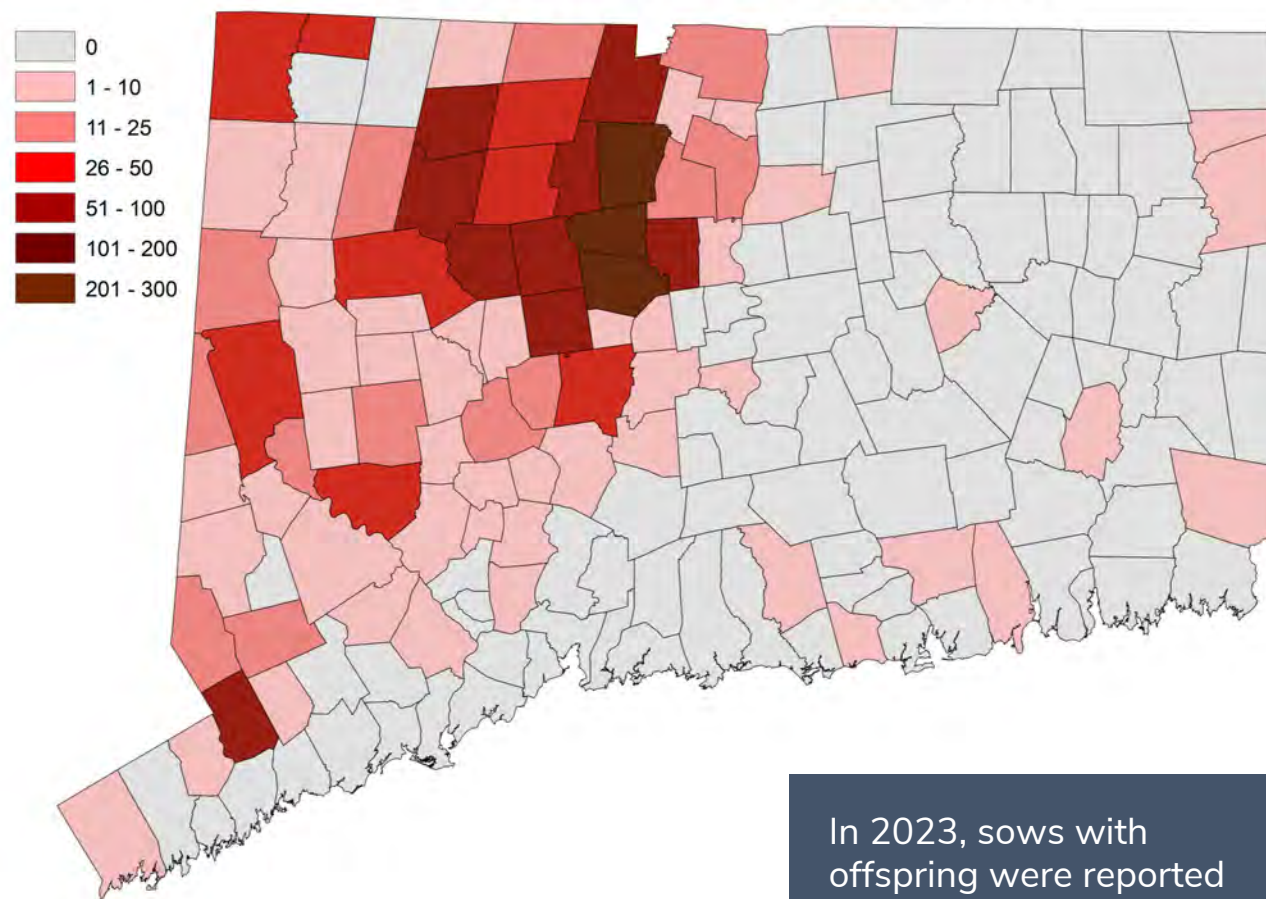|	
	0
	1-25
	26-50
	51-100
	101-200
	201-400
	401-800

Bear Range is Expanding

Reports of sows (female bears) with offspring provide a better representation of where the breeding population of bears are in the state. Females disperse relatively short distances when leaving their birth range compared to males. Because they disperse shorter distances than males, females are slower to spread the leading edge of black bear range in CT.

The longer, wandering dispersal of young male bears helps to explain why sightings of bears are reported across CT, but relatively few reports of sows with offspring come from outside the western half of the state.
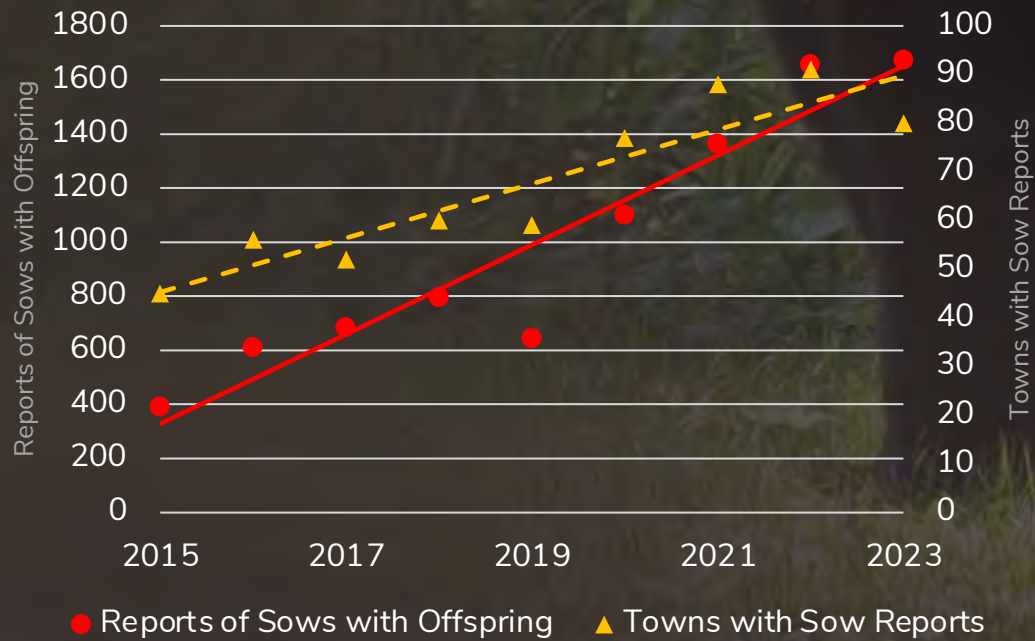

SOW WITH OFFSPRING **2023**

- 0
- 1 - 10
- 11 - 25
- 26 - 50
- 51 - 100
- 101 - 200
- 201 - 300

In 2023, sows with offspring were reported in over 80 towns in CT.

The breeding population of bears in CT is continuing on a long-term trend of expansion into more cities and towns. Over the last three years, sows with offspring have been reported in 117 different municipalities.

Sow Reports Through 2023
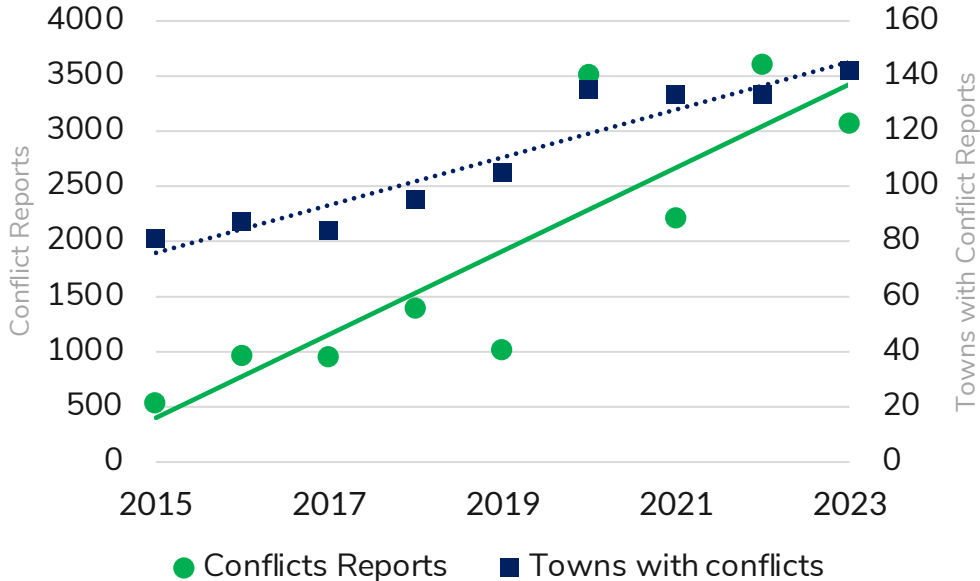
Bear Population and Growth

There are 1000-1200 Estimated Bears in Connecticut

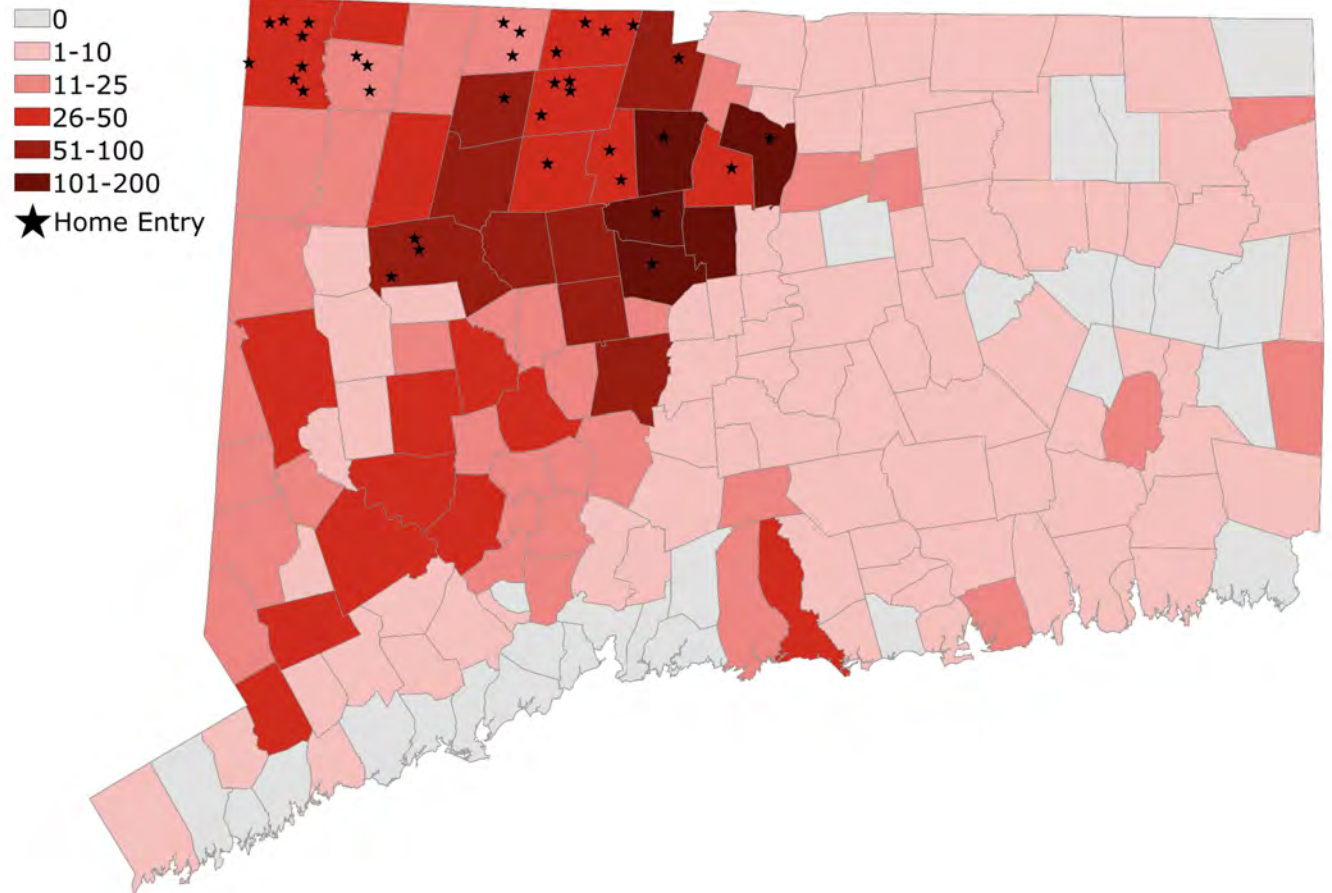|	RECENT 3-YEAR AVERAGE
Offspring per sow	2.6
First year survival	81%
Bears killed by vehicles	67

DEEP's long-term research has shown that Connecticut's bear population has a high reproduction rate compared to some other areas of black bear range. This is in part because of the abundance of suitable habitat and excessive human-related food across their range. The population has a high potential for growth.

Bear Conflicts

Thousands of human-black bear conflicts are reported each year and also follow a long-term increasing trend. While greater numbers of conflicts take place in the western half of CT, residents are reporting issues with bears from all across the state. Incidences of bear entering or breaking into homes occurred in 15 different municipalities statewide.

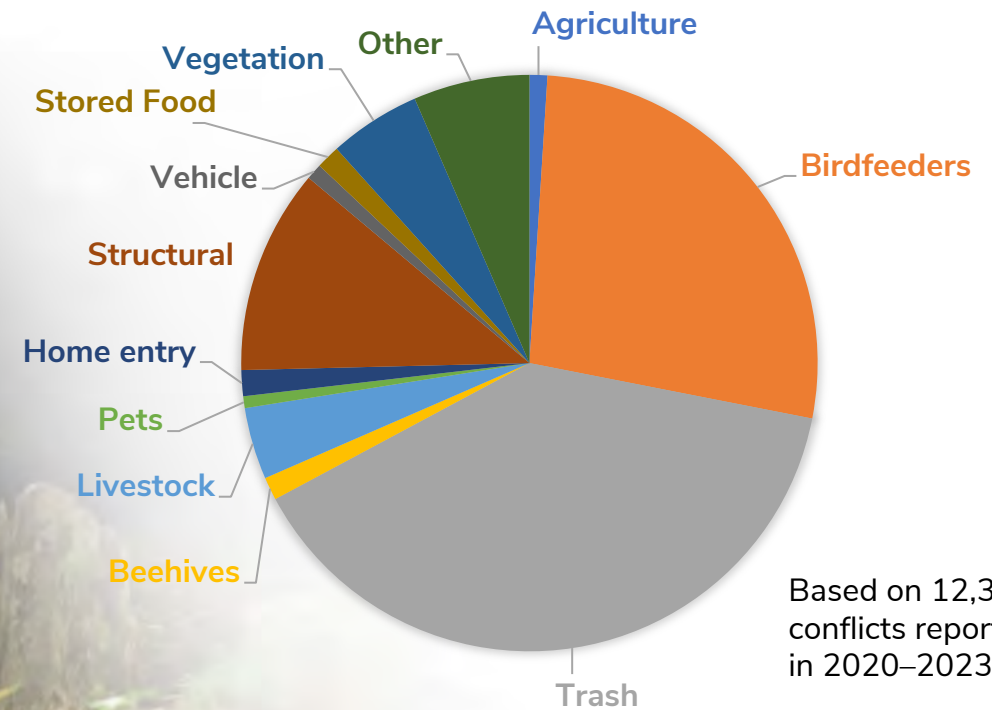HUMAN-BLACK BEAR CONFLICTS IN **2023**

More than 85% of livestock conflicts in recent years involve backyard chickens.

Conflict Reports

The number of serious conflicts involving bears is rising each year. Reports of home entries, livestock attacks, apiary and other agricultural damage, damage to vehicles and structures, as well as physical altercations with pets and people are following a long-term upward trend. In 2023, CT experienced two bear attacks on humans. The vast majority of the public's bear-related issues stem from birdfeeders and trash.

Vegetation
Stored Food
Vehicle
Structural
Home entry
Pets
Livestock
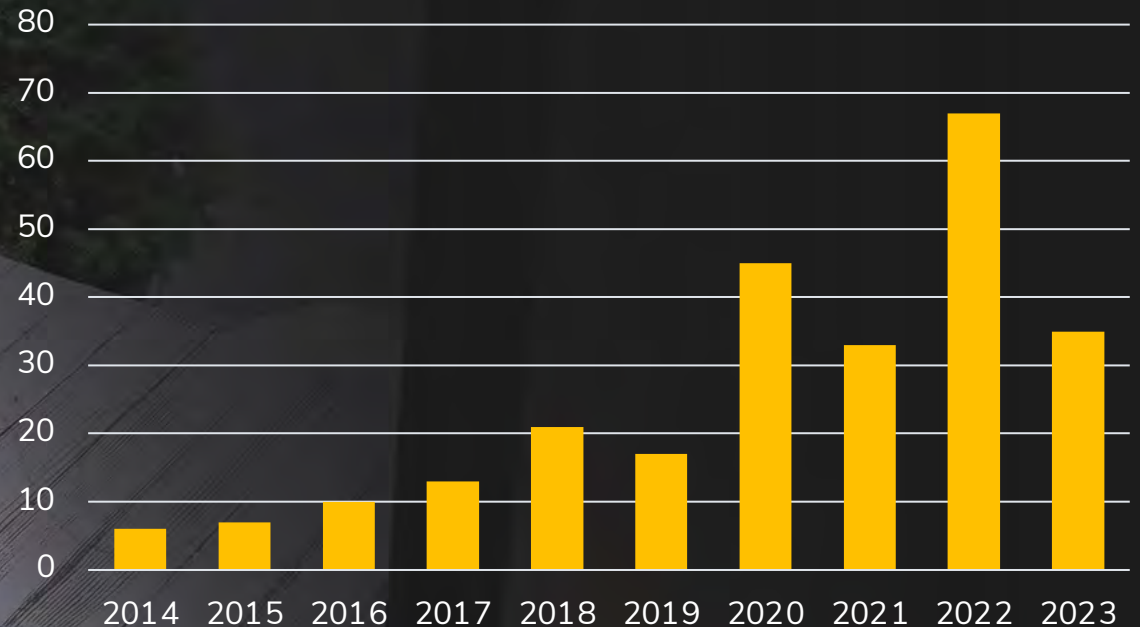Beehives
Other
Agriculture
Birdfeeders
Trash

Based on 12,384 conflicts reported in 2020–2023

Bears in Houses

Bear home entries reached a new record in 2022, with 67 incidents reported. This past year, 35 home entries occurred, continuing the long-term increasing trend. Plentiful rainfall in 2023 led to abundant natural foods throughout the year, which could help explain why fewer bears entered homes seeking easy meals compared to 2022.
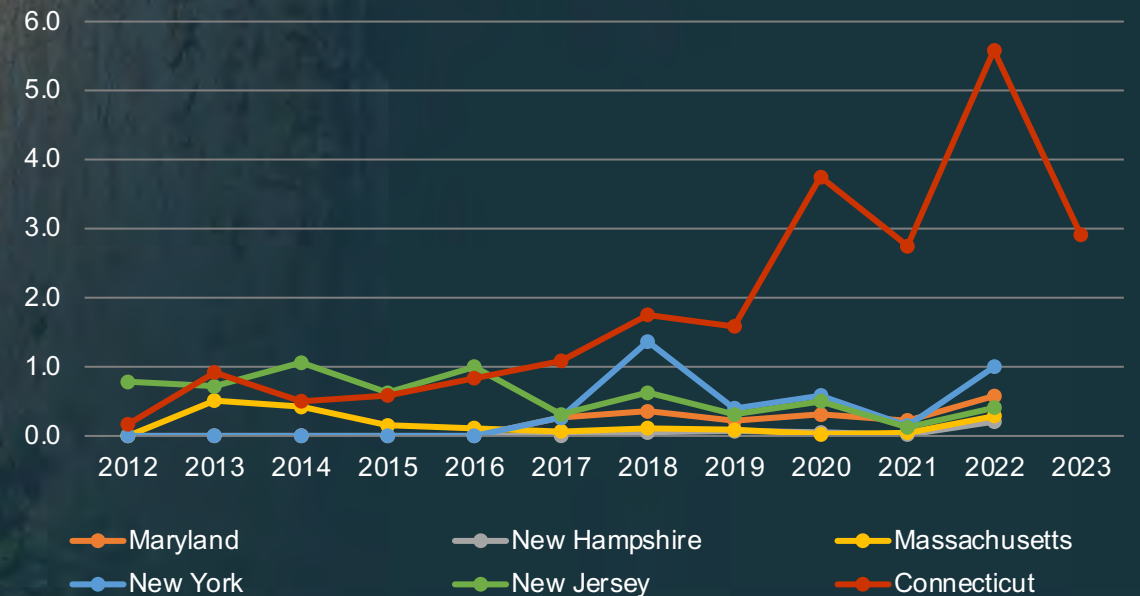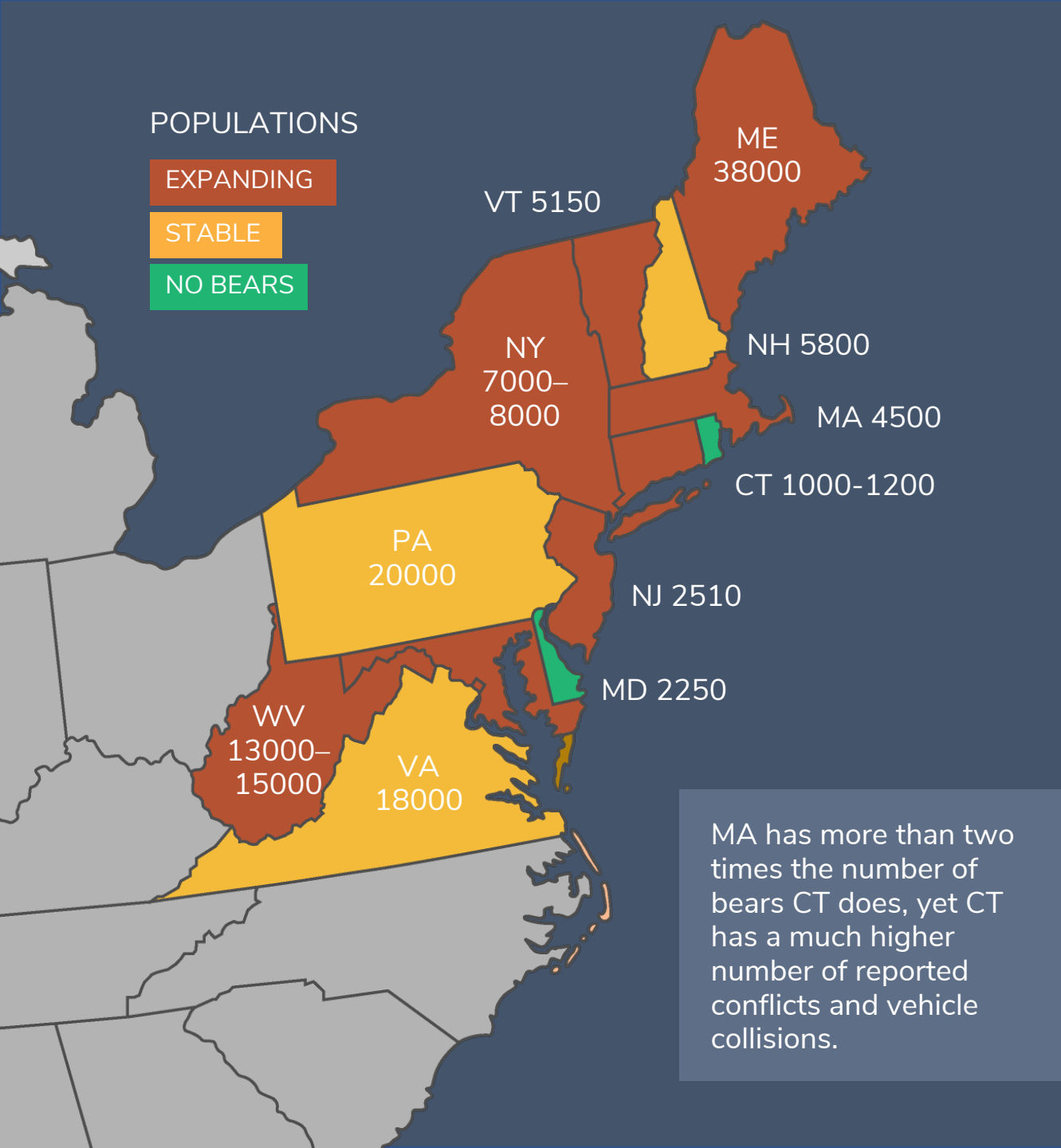
Annual Reports of Home Entries 2014–2023

Home entries and attempted entries can cause significant damage to the home.

Conflicts and Home Entries Reported to DEEP

Even though there were fewer home entries in 2022 than 2023, the long-term trend in CT is still cause for concern. Scaled for each state's estimated bear population size, CT's home entries far exceed those of neighboring states. MA and NY, each with about 4500 and 7000 bears, respectively, see less than 1 home entry per 100 bears each year. While over the last 6 years, CT has averaged 3.1 home entries per 100 bears each year.

Maryland
New Hampshire
Massachusetts
New York
New Jersey
Connecticut

Other State's Populations and Conflicts

POPULATIONS

EXPANDING

STABLE

NO BEARS

ME 38000
VT 5150
NY 7000–8000
NH 5800
MA 4500
CT 1000-1200
PA 20000
NJ 2510
MD 2250
WV 13000–15000
VA 18000

MA has more than two times the number of bears CT does, yet CT has a much higher number of reported conflicts and vehicle collisions.

STATE	AVG. ANNUAL CONFLICTS	AVG. ANNUAL VEHICLE KILLS
Massachusetts	504	34
Maine	573	29
New Hampshire	614	59
New Jersey	1247	86
New York	1000	55
Pennsylvania	3187	414
Virginia	1895	-
Vermont	504	94
West Virginia	822	86
Maryland	54	11
Connecticut	870	40

Other State's Hunting and Feeding Laws

In 2023, several new bear-related laws were enacted in Connecticut. Intentional feeding of bears is now prohibited, and farmers may seek permits to address excessive bear damage to crops or livestock.

Scan to learn more about new bear laws.

STATE	HUNTING	AVG. HARVEST	PERCENT OF POP	FEEDING BEARS
Massachusetts	Yes	246	5.5	Legal
Maine	Yes	3003	7.9	Legal
New Hampshire	Yes	816	14.1	Unlawful
New Jersey	Yes	411	16.4	Unlawful
New York	Yes	1519	19.0–21.7	Unlawful
Pennsylvania	Yes	3354	16.8	Unlawful
Virginia	Yes	2570	14.3	Unlawful
Vermont	Yes	645	12.5	Unlawful
West Virginia	Yes	2912	19.4–22.4	Unlawful
Maryland	Yes	119	5.3	Unlawful
Connecticut	No	NA	NA	Unlawful*

*As of 10/1/2023 it became unlawful to intentionally feed bears in CT.
Source: 2019 Survey of Eastern State and Provincial Black Bear Biologists, 24th Eastern Black Bear Workshop
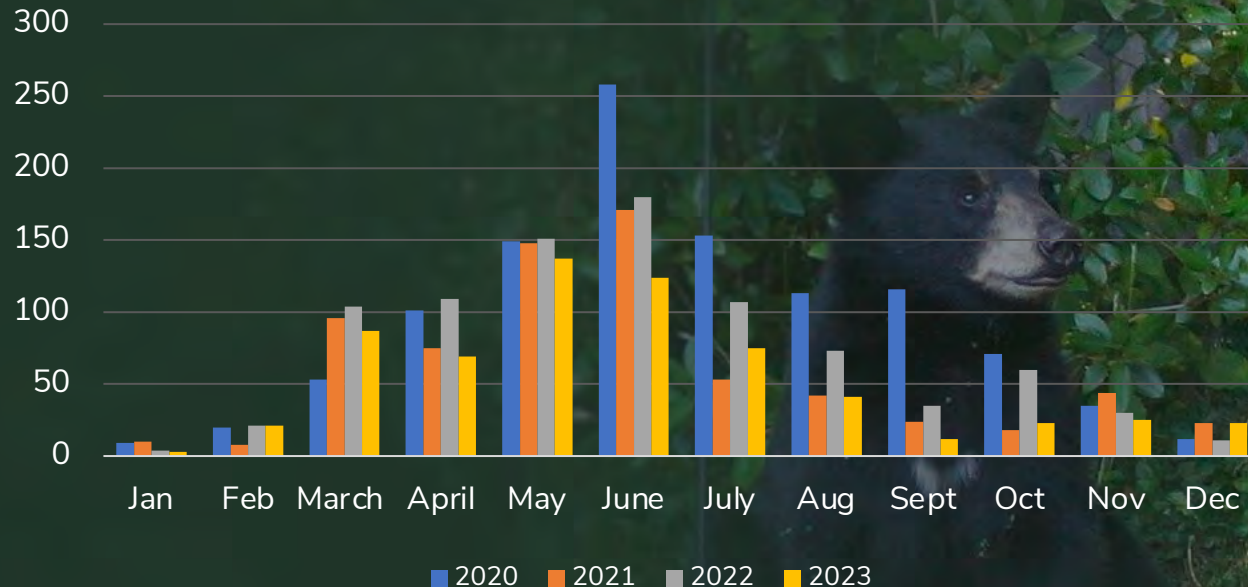
The Best Way to Coexist

- **Be Bear Aware** and remember, bears can be found anywhere in our state.

- **Manage your food, garbage, and other attractants** with bears in mind. Bear-resistant trash cans are successfully used by more residents each year, talk to your trash hauler to see if they are available in your area.

- **Remove all traces of bird food,** including hummingbird feeders.

- **Use suitable electric fencing** to exclude opportunistic bears from damaging livestock, beehives, fruit trees, and more.

- **If you see a bear in your neighborhood, leave it alone**, give it an escape route, keep dogs leashed, and don't get closer trying to get a better look or take a photo.

- **Scare away bears that are loitering around your home** or looking for human-related foods. Do your best to prevent troubling bear behavior before it starts.

Feeding Ordinances

To help curb feeding related issues with bears, some municipalities have instituted ordinances against intentionally and unintentionally feeding bears, which includes prohibiting bird feeders during the warmer part of the year. Ordinances have been passed in the following towns: Colebrook (2010), Hartland (2019), Barkhamsted (2020), Simsbury (2020), East Granby (2020), Granby (2021), Manchester (2021), Farmington (2021), and Salisbury (2022). Even with a statewide ban on intentionally feeding dangerous wildlife, municipal ordinances will still play a role in addressing the needs of a local community. For example, local ordinances may prohibit specific behaviors like birdfeeding or requiring bear-resistant trash cans.

Reported Black Bear Birdfeeder Conflicts 2020–2023

Being Bear Aware

In 2023, DEEP published informational cards on how to protect livestock, apiaries, and poultry using electric fencing. These cards provide fence setup tips and system specifications that are effective in deterring bears. We have worked with retailers in areas with high bear conflicts to make this information more accessible to residents.

BearWise® is a program that provides sound information and smart solutions that help homeowners, businesses and communities coexist with bears. Connecticut is a member state of this national program to help people live responsibly with black bears.

Visit Bearwise

For more information visit:

portal.ct.gov/DEEP

Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection