

# FAQ About Bears

## Questions and Answers About NJ's Black Bears

The following are questions and answers concerning bears and bear management in New Jersey. Information is accurate as of June, 2006.

**Q. Who is responsible for managing black bears in New Jersey?**

A. The NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife is mandated to protect and manage all wildlife in the state. In fulfillment of this responsibility, the agency is seeking to manage the growing black bear resource while minimizing negative impacts to the human population.

**Q. How does the Division view the black bear in New Jersey?**

A. The Division believes that black bears are an important part of New Jersey's natural heritage, and a vital component of healthy ecosystems.

**Q. What is New Jersey's historical bear population and how has it changed over time?**

A. Prior to European settlement, bears were numerous and occurred throughout the entire state. By 1900, settlers had practically eliminated New Jersey's black bears by clearing nearly all the state's forests for lumber, fuel and agriculture, and by killing bears indiscriminately as "vermin". As a result of the protection provided by "game animal" status, population increases in Pennsylvania and New York, and forest maturation providing improved habitat, NJ black bear numbers have been increasing and their range expanding since the 1980s.

**Q. Was the black bear always a game animal in New Jersey?**

A. No. The Division and the Fish and Game Council have managed black bears as a game animal since 1953. A black bear hunting season for New Jersey was established in 1958.

**Q. Weren't black bear numbers kept low in New Jersey through extensive hunting?**

A. No. The population remained small throughout most of the 20th century due to limited amounts of suitable habitat. There were legal hunting seasons for black bear in New Jersey only in the years 1958, and 1962 through 1970. The limited hunting season during those 10 years resulted in only 46 bears being harvested, indicating a relatively small population. This prompted the Division, the Fish and Game Council and the sportsmen of New Jersey to close the season in 1971.

**Q. Where do bears live in NJ?**

A. Black bears inhabit the forested regions of northern and central New Jersey. Prime habitat consists of mixed hardwood forests, dense swamps and forested wetlands. Bears are highly adaptable, living in and among human development. The Division considers the primary bear range of NJ to be that area north of Interstate 80 and west of Interstate 287 in Sussex, Warren, Passaic and Morris counties.

Bears are found, however, across a 2600 square mile area in northern and central NJ from High Point, Sussex County to Washingtons Crossing, Mercer County to the Palisades, Bergen County. During the past 5 years bear range has been steadily expanding southward and eastward from the northwestern part of the state. Dispersing bears are beginning to occupy suitable habitat in east central (Monmouth County) and southern (Ocean County) New Jersey and bear sightings have been recorded as far south as Atlantic, Cumberland and Cape May counties.

**Q. Do NJ black bears hibernate?**

A. New Jersey's black bears are not true hibernators and can be active all year long. Their heart rate

and respiratory rate slow but do not drop as low as a true hibernator (such as wood chuck). There are some physiological changes: They stay in a torpor, typically do not defecate or urinate, and live off of their body fat. They are, however, fully capable of getting up and moving if disturbed or if weather is mild.

**Q. How does the Division determine how many bears are in New Jersey?**

A. Division personnel estimate the population using data collected by actually capturing and handling bears. The Division has been conducting intensive research for more than 20 years and has handled over 1400 bears. Mark-recapture, radio telemetry and annual monitoring of denned females with cubs have provided the data on densities, breeding age and productivity, mortality and longevity. This data is collectively used to provide a scientific population estimate. The Division has been conducting bear studies in the Kittatinny (Western) and Bearfort (Eastern) regions since 1980. The Eastern Region comprises an area of approximately 350 square miles and the Western Region approximately 230 square miles.

**Q. So, how many bears are there in New Jersey today?**

A. Division biologists have calculated a 2003 population estimate of 947 bears for the Eastern region and 543 bears for the Western region. The total population estimate for the approximately 580 square mile area adequately sampled was 1490 bears, or 2.56 bears/sq. mile, at the start of the 2003 bear hunting season. Division biologists have determined the 2005 population estimate for the same 580 sq. mile research area to be 1606 bears. Division biologists have not extrapolated the estimates throughout bear occupied range in NJ.

**Q. What is the Division's overall bear management strategy?**

A. The Division of Fish and Wildlife's overall integrated bear management strategy includes a public education campaign, black bear research and monitoring, and the aggressive wildlife control measures of aversive conditioning, trapping and removal, and euthanization of bears that pose a public safety threat.

**Q. Why do bear/human conflicts exist?**

A. Black bears in New Jersey have adapted to live in close proximity to people and human development, taking advantage of human-derived food sources and protected habitats. Increasing human development and the coincident increase of the bear population has resulted in an increase in bear-human conflicts. The expanding human habitat/bear habitat interface provides potential for conflict because individual black bears searching for food are contacting humans throughout their home ranges.

**Q. How many complaints about bears does the Division receive? What kinds of problems do bears create?**

A. The following table details the number and type of bear complaints reported to the Division:

Number of Black Bear Complaints 1999-2005 Reported to NJ DFW Wildlife Control Unit							
INCIDENT TYPE	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
NUISANCE	468	483	357	525	357	229	387
GARBAGE	496	290	269	379	503	282	358
BIRDFEEDER	274	202	137	137	89	59	87
PROTECTED HIVE	4	7	0	2	3	5	2
UNPROTECTED HIVE	19	16	13	24	9	5	9
LIVESTOCK KILL	25	22	36	27	17	24	24
RABBIT KILL	28	38	57	34	38	27	15

UNPROVOKED DOG ATTACK	12	17	6	15	11	5	8
PROVOKED DOG ATTACK	***	***	***	***	22	4	4
HOME ENTRY	29	29	29	55	53	24	29
AGGRESSIVE	34	51	37	28	19	7	21
CAMPSITE / PARK	28	22	5	10	1	3	0
URBAN REMOVAL	10	7	12	19	11	12	38
PROPERTY DAMAGE	232	191	123	111	132	44	83
HUMAN ATTACK	0	0	1	1	2	1	1
ATTEMPTED HOME ENTRY	*	*	5	25	23	10	23
AGRICULTURAL DAMAGE	*	*	5	9	5	10	8
TENT ENTRY	*	*	2	5	4	2	3
VEHICLE ENTRY	*	*	2	6	9	3	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,659</b>	<b>1,375</b>	<b>1,096**</b>	<b>1,412**</b>	<b>1,308**</b>	<b>756**</b>	<b>1,104**</b>

\* Separate Incident Type beginning in 2001

\*\* Does not include calls handled by police departments.

\*\*\* New Incident Type for 2003

Police training in increased involvement began in 2001. These years are **signified in red**.

**Q. How do people contribute to bear-human problems?**

A. Bears that are fed by people (intentionally or unintentionally) are likely to end up in problem situations. The Division urges residents to not feed bears under any circumstances and to "bear-proof" their surroundings to minimize potential conflicts with bears.

**Q. What measures has the Division taken to resolve bear-people conflicts?**

A. The Division has been conducting an intensive public education campaign to teach residents, hikers, anglers and campers in "bear country" how to successfully coexist with these animals. Efforts include presentations to school children, civic organizations, communities and other groups, as well as the development of an educational video, public service announcements, brochures, signs and other educational materials. The black bear education program was awarded a national award for excellence for 1999.

**Q. How does the Division respond to complaints?**

A. The Wildlife Control Unit employs biologists and technicians trained in wildlife management techniques who provide advice to callers with minor bear problems and technical assistance to homeowners, beekeepers and agriculturists with serious damage problems. These WCU personnel, who are qualified in firearms use and chemical immobilization, also actively trap and aversively condition bears responsible for recurring nuisance incidents and euthanize bears that show unyielding or aggressive behavior, or that do not respond to the conditioning process.

**Q. Can the Division manage black bear problems solely by expanding the education and aversive conditioning programs?**

A. The Division recognizes and is committed to education and aversive conditioning as valuable tools in managing conflicts between bears and people. However, education and aversive conditioning alone will never reduce conflicts to a level that will be acceptable to the people whose property and safety are affected. Since 1998, the Division has produced and distributed nearly 2.5 million pieces of educational material. The material produced and distributed include:

300,000 - **You Are in Bear Country** brochures (for park, campground and outdoor recreationists)  
566,000 - **Living in Bear Country** brochures (for residential households)  
53,000 - **Signs** for use in parks and campgrounds  
200,000 - **Camper cards** on behavior in bear country  
206,000 - **Garbage can fliers** for residential households  
500,000 - **Educational brochures** for children  
40,000 - **Educational coloring books** for children  
350,000 - **Educational bookmarks**  
110,000 - **Educational bookcovers**  
45,000 - **"Do Not Feed the Bears"** bumper stickers

During the same period staff have made over 300 presentations or manned exhibits that have provided black bear information to over 30,000 people. Even with this extensive public education program, the level of bear/human conflict remains high.

The intensive aversive conditioning of nuisance bears and euthanization of dangerous bears conducted by Division personnel, police officers and park rangers trained in bear response has not resulted in a significant reduction in the number of serious bear/human conflicts.

**Q. What about other control alternatives such as chemical or surgical sterilization or relocation?**

A. The DEP commissioned a study to assess the present status and the feasibility of using fertility control agents, including contraceptive drugs, sterilization drugs and surgical sterilization on black bears in New Jersey. Right now **there is no FDA approved contraceptive drug** (including SpayVac) or sterilization drug (including Neutersol) available for bears. See the October, 2006, DEP Div. of Science and Research report, [An Analysis of the Feasibility of Using Fertility Control to Manage New Jersey Black Bear Populations.](#)

Even if it were found to be feasible, we would still have the same size population of bears. Relocating bears entails significant expense and it also requires suitable relocation areas. In New Jersey there is limited area in which to relocate bears. Relocating bears to the Pinelands of southern New Jersey, which has been suggested and is a viable option, has met with serious opposition by residents in that region. Also, moving a problem bear from one area to another is not a solution.