



Living With Connecticut Wildlife

By Pem McNerney
Living Editor

Madison Animal Control Officer Fran Fellows keeps a stack of flyers in her van that explain how to haze a coyote so it won't want to come back into your yard, ever again. Acting Animal Control Officer Jae Wolf, who covers Essex, Deep River, and Chester, recommends keeping pots and pans handy at home to bang together to scare off unwanted wildlife. North Haven's Assistant Animal Control Officer Chrystal Rashba says keep an eye on your dog before you let it out. If he or she is acting strange, that may be because you have an unwanted visitor.

Those are just a few of the tactics area animal control officers

are using to remind shoreline residents that population of so-called "nuisance wildlife," including black bears and coyotes, continues to increase and that the rest of us have to learn how to deal with it.

Unfortunately, for both people and the animals, there are still all too many who don't know what to do when they encounter wild critters that don't play well with humans or their pets.

Here are seven things you need to know now, they say:

- If you do nothing else, make sure your dogs and cats are vaccinated against rabies. Otherwise, if your pet has an encounter with a wild animal that cannot be trapped, killed, and tested, your animal may have be killed, or

quarantined for up to six months, according to state law.

- Do not leave a dog outside unsupervised, or on a tether, or in a yard with an invisible fence, or in a yard with short fence. The tether or fence could serve as a trap for your dog if a coyote attacks.

- If you have cats and want them to live a long life, keep them inside.

- When walking a dog, make sure it's leashed or stays close enough to you that you can ward off a wild animal if it approaches. Roaming dogs can be perceived as threats by coyotes and bears and may be attacked.

- If you do encounter a coyote (one that is not hurt or not with pups), make yourself large, get

loud, and try to scare it away. If you encounter a coyote that is injured, or with pups, make yourself look large, make eye contact, and slowly back away.

- If you encounter a bear, make yourself look large, get loud, and slowly back away. As with coyotes, if it's injured or with cubs, do not do anything to make it feel threatened.

- If you encounter an injured wild animal, or one that persistently approaches humans, or one that is otherwise acting strangely, contact your local animal control officer.

Why So Many?

The Essex, Chester, Deep River area is seeing a few more bears than usual this year. As of early

September, there were 14 sightings in Chester, seven in Deep River, and eight in Essex. That doesn't necessarily mean there are 29 bears, that just means there were 29 sightings in that area.

"I'm going to say that seems like a bit more than last year and it's not over yet," Wolf said.

There haven't been any reported in Old Saybrook so far, and sightings vary in other area towns, from seven in Madison and six in Guilford, to one or two in Westbrook, Clinton, Killingworth, North Branford, Branford, East Haven, and North Haven.

Paul Rego, a wildlife biologist with the state Department of

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Forest edges are where certain kinds of so-called *nuisance wildlife thrive*. The animals have the best of both worlds—a forested area with water and shelter, and access to a steady source of *food from humans*, including *bird feeders*, *garbage cans*, *food left outside* for domesticated animals, and small cats and dogs left outside by owners who don't know better, or who don't heed the warnings they have heard.

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Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP), said the increase in the population of bears appears to be out-pacing the number of people who know how to respond appropriately when they encounter a bear.

As the population of bears has been increasing, “More people are becoming aware they are present...but at the same time, we are aware that a segment of our human population still is not taking steps to avoid bear conflict, so there still is a need for education,” he said.

Rego is the co-author of a 2014 report in *The Journal of Wildlife Management* that outlines several reasons why conflicts between bears and humans are becoming more common in Connecticut, most notably forest edge habitat.

“If you have a large, continuous forest, there’s not much edge,” he said. “But if you have the same amount of forest chopped up into little blocks, you have a higher number of forest edges.”

Forest edges are where certain kinds of so-called nuisance wildlife thrive. The animals have the best of both worlds—a forested area with water and shelter, and access to a steady source of food from humans, including bird feeders, garbage cans, food left outside for domesticated animals, and small cats and dogs left outside by owners who don’t know better, or who don’t heed the warnings they have heard.

The report notes that “nature landscapes are viewed by many homeowners as desirable.” It also notes that “residents of high-income areas had an increased propensity for reporting incidents.”

What can be done?

Some New England states have instituted black bear hunting seasons to deal with the growth in the bear population. Rego said that’s not officially under discussion at the DEEP, which would have to change its regulations to allow for it, if there was support for it in the state.

He noted that there are other ways for homeowners, neighborhoods, towns, and the state to reduce the chances of encounters.

“The state could prohibit the feeding of bears,” Rego said.

As remarkable as this might sound, there are people who try to lure bears closer with food or who otherwise try to treat them like pets.

Rego says the best chance of reducing encounters should include public education campaigns. Public education initiatives and garbage ordinances should be the first line of attack, since reducing animal populations is not practical, the 2014 report says.

In the meantime, secure your garbage and bird feeders, and make sure your pets are vaccinated against rabies and keep a close eye on them, local animal control officers say.

“I would say, just stay clear of them to the extent you can,” said Wolf. “They are a part of our landscape now, so they’re going to be around. If you see them, start banging the pots and pans. But, mainly, just don’t get too close to them, it’s a matter of respecting nature.”

And Fellows said repeatedly that owners of small dogs should not put them out in the yard, even if it’s fenced. The fence or the tether would just trap the dog while the coyote attacked, sometimes only leaving the grisly remains.

“They’re everywhere,” she said of the coyotes. “But we still see people with little dogs putting them out there. They just can’t do that.”



How to Haze a Coyote

Get Large, Get Loud, Act Strange

By Pem McNerney

Living Editor

If you see a coyote in your yard, staring you down, what do you do?

Here’s what not to do: Don’t pretend it’s a puppy and try to call it over. Don’t ignore it. Don’t run away.

If you want it to go away and never come back, here are some recommendations from the U.S. Humane Society (USHS).

Stare it down, get large and loud, get silly and scream and dance and wave your arms. Scare the coyote away so that it will never come back. Act normal? No. Act strange? Yes.

If strange does not come naturally to you, here are some specific techniques.

- Yell and wave your arms while approaching the coyote.
- Use your voice, whistles, noise makers, air horns, shaker cans, pots, pans.
- Throw sticks, small rocks, cans, tennis balls, or soccer balls.
- Spray it with a hose, a water gun or spray bottle with vinegar spray, or pepper spray or bear repellent if you have some.

If the coyote has not been hazed (frightened away) before, it might stand there for a bit. Walk toward it slowly and increase the intensity of your hazing. It’s important to continue to go after the coyote until he completely leaves the area, the USHS advises.

If you’re going for a walk with your dog, consider carrying a homemade noisemaker, whistle or small air horn.

If coyote sightings are common in your neighborhood, get your neighbors in on this. Have a group coyote hazing training session. The more people who do it, and who stop treating them like the pets they aren’t, the better.

The exception to all of this is if the coyote is injured or with its pups. In that case, consider retreating and calling your local animal control officer.

For more information, the USHS recommends viewing the “How to Haze a Coyote” instructional video posted on YouTube by the City of Aurora, Colorado.

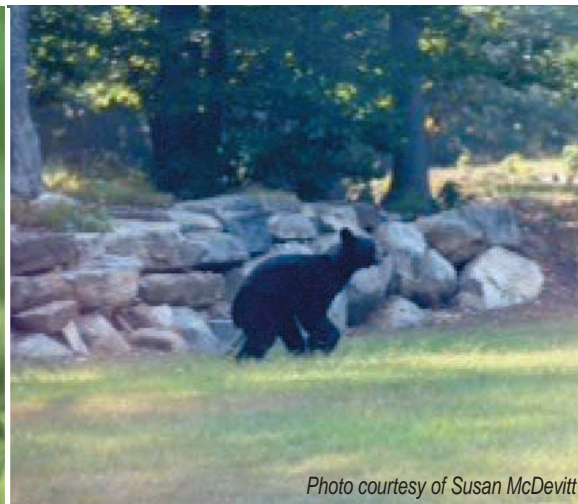


Photo courtesy of Susan McDevitt

Back Away from that Bear

How to Reduce the Chances of a Bear Becoming a Problem

By Pem McNerney

Living Editor

The problem with bears in Connecticut is not just that the population is steadily increasing, up to about 600 to 700. It’s also that there are still people who don’t know what to do about that. Here are some tips from the Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP) when it comes to bear do’s and don’ts.

- Remove birdfeeders and bird food from late March through November
- Put garbage cans in a secure garage or shed, or invest in a bear-proof garbage can
- Add ammonia to the trash to make it less attractive to bears
- Clean your grill and store it after use
- Don’t ever feed a bear. It could lose its natural fear of humans, become a nuisance bear and have to be euthanized
- Don’t leave pet food out overnight
- Talk with your neighbors and make sure they are taking the same steps

What if you see a bear while hiking? DEEP says make your presence known, by making noise and waving your arms. Keep your dog on a leash and under control. Try to back away slowly.

“Experience has shown that a single wandering bear can be responsible for numerous sightings reported to the Wildlife Division,” the DEEP website www.ct.gov/deep states. “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.”

Finally, if you do see a bear, report it by going to <http://www.depdata.ct.gov/wildlife/sighting/bearrpt.htm>.

And if you see a bear near your home that won’t go away when you scare it, or one that appears to be injured, or is with its cubs, call the local animal control officer and let him or her know.