



GREEN NEWS

BOBCATS (AND BEARS) ARE DOING WELL IN CONNECTICUT - AND THEY ARE ALL AROUND US!



By Paula Jones

Chair Bloomfield Conservation
Energy & Environment Committee

Black Bear sightings make news regularly in Connecticut these days. My personal experience certainly has been consistent with reports that sightings are on the rise. Besides seeing bears going through my yard this summer, I've recently seen several crossing roads or waiting for a break in traffic to cross.

But it's less common to see a bobcat than a bear since bobcats are generally more secretive animals. A few weeks ago, within the space of a couple days, bobcats crossed the road in front of my car twice, once

on Tunxis Avenue in Bloomfield, then on Route 20 in Granby. What is the population trend for these animals in Connecticut? A lot of great information can be found on the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's (DEEP's) website (<https://portal.ct.gov/dep/wildlife/learn-about-wildlife/bobcats-in-connecticut>).

Bobcats (and bears) are doing very well in Connecticut and their populations are increasing.

The DEEP website has a "Wildlife Sighting Public Viewer" which shows the number of reported sightings of bobcats, bears, and moose by town

thus far in 2024. (Note that a single animal may be reported multiple times.) Here are the current counts: Bloomfield: 44 bobcats, 135 bear, and one moose; Windsor: 17 bobcats, 128 bear, 1 moose; Windsor Locks: 5 bobcats, 44 bear, 5 moose. (I keep missing the moose...)

In addition to tracking public sightings of bobcats, DEEP's Wildlife Division is doing a multi-year study on these beautiful wildcats to find out how they use habitat in different

housing densities. (That study includes bobcats collared and ear-tagged in Bloomfield and Windsor.) Here are some highlights of what the wildlife biologists have learned so far:

(1) Bobcats like the suburbs!

The cats are choosing habitats close to human development, even when they have choices of larger undeveloped tracts of land nearby. This suggests there's a benefit (squirrels! chipmunks!) to spending time hunting near houses.

(2) The availability of ambush cover for hunting and the existence of travel corridors are essential as far as their use of suburban or urban areas.

(3) Female bobcats use brush piles, downed trees, and even sheds as den sites. When they have kittens they move the den to a new location every couple

of weeks to minimize the kittens' scent at any one place. This helps keep the kits safe and hidden.

(4) The majority of a bobcat's diet consists of rabbits, squirrels, and other small rodents. They are not interested in eating you or your pets.

Although bobcats have had a reputation of being secretive, they appear to be adjusting to life in the suburbs and being seen out and about. A tagged and collared cat once took a two-hour nap in my front yard. And I was fortunate to be part of a large group that watched one stalk a rabbit while we enjoyed a potluck in a friend's backyard. (It didn't catch the rabbit.) So if you're lucky enough to see one of these adaptable and beautiful cats, enjoy the view.