

# Portage County Has Most Black Bear Sightings in Ohio

By Associated Press

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COLUMBUS -- Reported sightings of the endangered black bear rose in Ohio last year, according to new state figures.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources said it received 224 sighting reports involving an estimated 93 black bears last year. That's up from 152 sighting reports the year before.

Sightings were confirmed last year in 21 of Ohio's 88 counties, mostly in northeast Ohio. Portage County had the most sightings reported at 36, and Trumbull County had the most confirmed sightings at 10. Portage County had six confirmed sightings, while Ashtabula, Geauga and Mahoning counties had five each.

Brown County in southwest Ohio had its first reported sighting last year since records have been kept, though it was unconfirmed. Also unconfirmed were three sightings of a sow and cubs and two sightings of lone cubs.

The black bear, native to Ohio, appears on the state's endangered species list and is protected under state law. The animal was considered extirpated from the state in the 1850s.

Occasional sightings increased into the 1980s, when they began to occur annually. Formal record-keeping began in 1993.

Black bears are not known to attack or kill children or pets as long as they are given space and not cornered, the department says. They are usually fearful of people. Wildlife officials urge people who see a bear to keep their distance.

The state received 39 nuisance reports in 2012, 17 confirmed, involving such things as damage to bird feeders, beehives or garbage containers.