

New Bedford's Buttonwood Park Zoo mourns loss of "Toby," beloved black bear

The Buttonwood Park Zoo is sad to announce the passing of Toby, a 23-year-old black bear and one of BPZ00's most iconic animals.

A team of veterinary and animal care staff at BPZ00 had been managing a variety of Toby's age-related illnesses for quite some time, including spondylosis (arthritis of the spine) and ankylosis (joint stiffness). Over the course of the last two years, Toby had responded well to treatment and keeper staff had been able to modify training, enrichment opportunities and his habitat to help ensure he was able to remain active and comfortable.

Late August 2022, the staff became increasingly concerned when Toby's condition and quality of life began to decline, exhibiting sporadic loss of the use of his hind legs. It was at this point, with no further options for treatment and his condition worsening, that the Zoo's animal care and veterinary team made the difficult decision to humanely euthanize him.



Buttonwood Park Zoo photo.

“Letting go of our animal residents is always challenging, particularly with those so beloved by our team and community,” said BPZ00 Director, Gary Lunsford. “Our hearts go out to those who provided his care over his many years.”

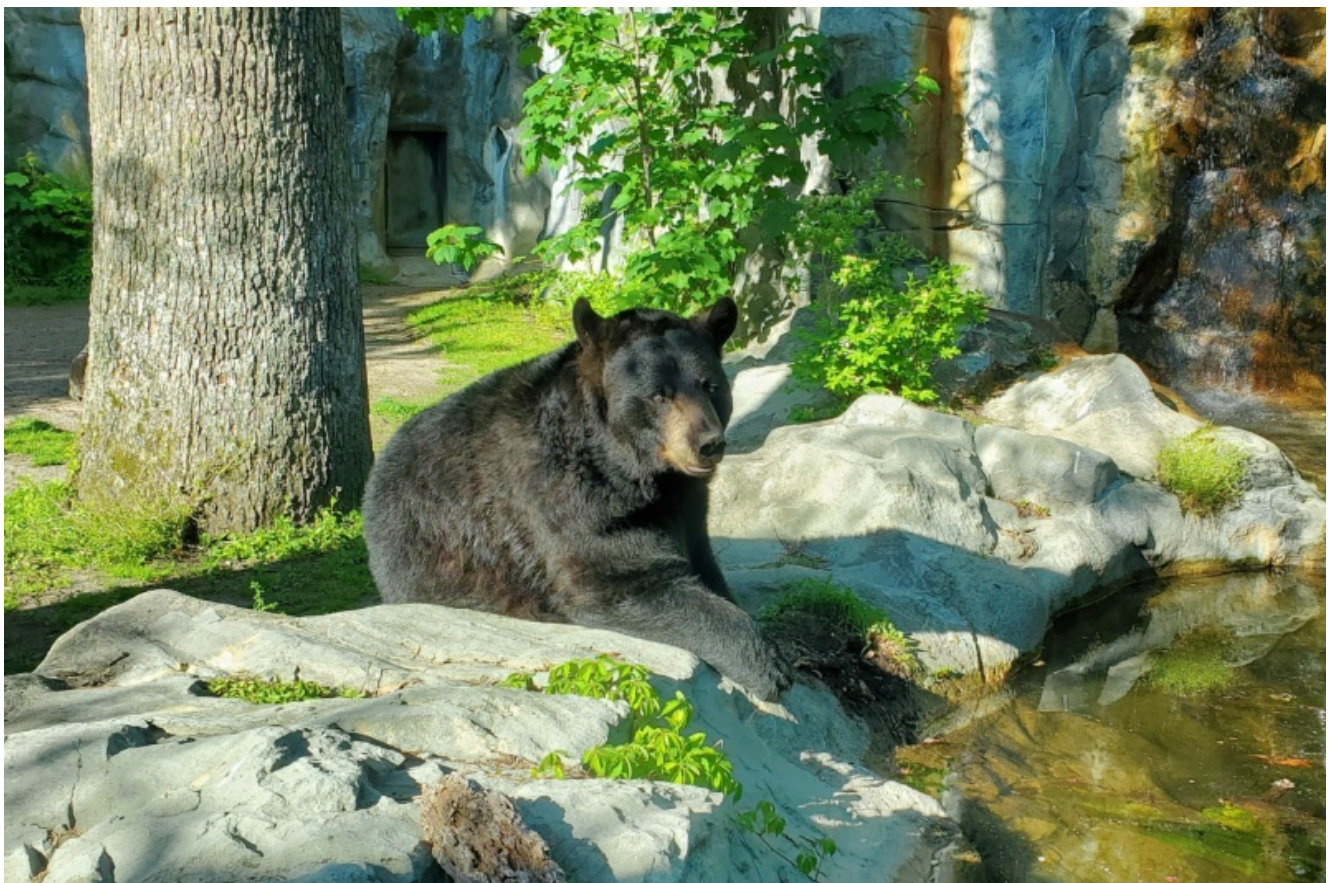
Toby is the last of the three black bears that came to live at

BPZ00 in 2000. Hailing originally from Clark's Trading Post in New Hampshire, he resided with fellow black bears, Amy and Ursula, who both passed away in 2020 of age-related illnesses.

Toby's caretakers describe him as a gentle giant who loved all food – except broccoli and zucchini – and one who loved to be the center of attention.

Kristy Kaeterle, BPZ00's Senior Zookeeper, worked with Toby for over 20 years.

"He was a big ham – he always made us laugh at how he would lounge in the sun in the funniest positions or steal all the hay overnight to make himself a king-sized bed."



Buttonwood Park Zoo photo.

The largest of the three black bears, Toby could easily toss a large log with just one paw, but his gentle nature endeared him to all those who knew him.

"He was such a handsome guy. He was adored by all, and he will

be sorely missed,” said Kaeterle.

While there is no replacing Toby, Ursula, or Amy, BPZ00 is hoping to continue to care for black bears in the coming years.

“We will take a little time to make some upgrades to the habitat before moving forward,” said Lunsford. “In the meantime, we will be exploring the best candidates for making Buttonwood Park Zoo their new home.”

American black bears are one of eight species of bears found around the world. Once common across North America, they are now present in 40 U.S. states, 12 provinces and territories of Canada, and 6 states of northern Mexico. Loss of habitat and unregulated hunting/persecution resulted in extirpation of black bears across large portions of their range by the early 1900s. While loss of forest cover has eliminated black bears from many areas, their numbers are increasing. Climate change seems to have enabled black bears to range farther north. American black bears are the smallest of the three bear species in North America, ranging from 200 – 600 pounds, with males being significantly larger. Average life expectancy for American black bears is 20 years.