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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Bear Kills 2 Berry Pickers in Siberia's Irkutsk Region

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A bear staring ominously in the distance. **John Thomas / unsplash**

A bear killed two men who were gathering wild berries in Siberia's Irkutsk region, police said Thursday, coming amid a reported rise in deadly encounters between humans and bears since the spring.

Law enforcement said the bear attacked three people who were foraging in the Taiga, killing a 55-year-old and a 65-year-old on Wednesday in a remote forest on the banks of the Lena River, located around 4,200 kilometers (2,610 miles) east of Moscow.

"One person managed to escape and report the incident," the regional branch of Russia's Interior Ministry said.

A search team of police officers and hunters located the bodies of the two men in the forest and opened fire after the bear was said to have appeared and behaved aggressively. The bear fled the area, and authorities are trying to track it down.

At least 14 people are now reported to have been killed in bear attacks across Russia since the start of the year, according to a tally by The Moscow Times. The number of non-fatal incidents is higher, experts say.

In the neighboring Krasnoyarsk region, investigators said Wednesday that a bear killed a 66-year-old woman in her remote village home.

The Natural Resources and Environment Ministry has dismissed reports of an uptick in bear attacks this year, noting that the annual figure tends to hover between 20 and 30, which includes both fatal and non-fatal incidents. In 2014, Russia saw a record 166 bear attacks.

Russia's brown bear population has more than doubled since 1990 and now stands at 307,000. Authorities have reportedly killed more than 530 aggressive bears across the country since the spring

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