

Hunting: Not A Solution, Just A Slaughter

1 References

1. Deer Friendly <http://www.deerfriendly.com/deer-population-control>
2. Non-lethal Methods of Controlling Deer Population Growth <http://www.ct.gov/caes/cwp/view.asp?a=2824&q=378098>
3. SolonDeer <http://solondeer.com>
4. Save Our Deer <http://saveourdeer.com/compensatory-rebound-effect/>

2 Problems with Hunting

Though hunting is still the most utilized method of supposed deer control, a closer examination reveals that it is ineffective, expensive and cruel.

Why consider alternatives to lethal control: Cities in the U.S. relying on urban deer culls are about equally divided between using sharpshooters and bow hunters. The Humane Societies of the United States and of Canada recommend against bow hunting to cull urban deer for reasons apparent in the picture at right. Based on national statistics, 50 percent of deer hit by an arrow are not recovered. Costs average about \$500 per deer, but vary widely. Although many hunters will not participate in an urban cull, considering it an extermination rather than a hunt, cities often find hunters willing to pay a license fee to participate ... For example, after 10 years of an annual urban cull, the environmental manager for Wilton, Connecticut, concludes "If we harvest 300 a year it could take us maybe seven [more] years ... But of course that does not include baby deer." The city of Little Canada, Minnesota did a deer survey in 2010 finding 110 deer in the town. They culled 52 animals. The next year, in 2011, the survey showed 109 animals, basically no change in the herd size. A long run advantage of birth control or spaying is that the remaining deer, particularly the does, defend their territory against in migration of new deer. Most cost analysis ignore these effects. (Ref 1)

Some of the limitations of hunting are presented below from a lecture by Dr. Uma Ramakrishnan at The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station and specializes in controlling deer reproduction through immunocontraceptives and contragestational agents (Ref 2):

Regulated hunting is the most widely used method of white-tailed deer control. While it is effective in some places, it can have the opposite effect in other places.

- *Hunting is often not feasible or safe in suburban areas, due to high human densities. It is also often not socially acceptable.*
- *Intermediate to low levels of hunting may result in improved overall deer health and reproductive output, because hunting often reduces competition for the surviving deer, which then have access to more food, resulting in more fawns.*
- *Deer learn to avoid areas during hunting season and take refuge in areas where hunting is restricted.*
- *Deer can stay bedded during the day and feed after dark, thus avoiding hunting periods hunting is prohibited after daylight hours.*

3 The Myth of Population Reduction through Culling

Culling has a very short-term effect, which is why politicians like to support it while hunters glorify it. Neither party want to be responsible for the Compensatory Rebound Effect (CRE).

Less deer, after hunting, plus the same abundant food source, equals better overall health, increasing fertility of female deer and causing them to conceive earlier and give birth to twins and triplets. The population rebounds right back up to the original number and eventually higher, much like the position Solon now finds itself in. Hunting to control populations is a manufactured myth, used to justify hunting. Deer can out-reproduce any extermination plan. (Ref 3)

Since 1974 managers of the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, New Jersey, have been holding a "management hunt" to control the refuges white-tailed deer population. Total harvests have risen consistently since 1974 and the 1995 harvest was almost exactly TWICE the 1974 harvest. (US Fish and Wildlife Service, unpublished data) (Ref 3)

The reality is that animal species regulate themselves reaching homeostasis based on food supply and weather conditions. Below are some expert testimonies cited on the SolonDeer website (Ref 3):

Government wildlife managers have understood for a century or more that killing a significant portion of a deer population helps ensure more deer will be present for hunting in the near future. Rather than solve problems, deer kills have become a big problem.

- Dr. Allen Rutberg, head of Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine: “The exponential rise in white-tailed deer populations in the United States during the last two decades makes a strong case that sport hunting has not controlled deer hunting.”
- Thomas Eveland, Ph.D: “As we have seen, wildlife biologists have been nurtured on the hunting philosophy and have been taught that ecosystems can be improved by manipulation ... Hunting, whether in the presence or absence of large predators is no guaranteed annual ‘check’ on deer populations.”
- Gary Alt, former Chief Deer Biologist: “Deer management has been the biggest mistake in the history of wildlife management.”

There are numerous reports and studies which examine the effect of hunting on deer reproduction. Excerpts from a few of these are presented below from DeerFriendly (Ref 3) and Save Our Deer (Ref 4).

After a cull ... the remaining deer produce more offspring in response to the increased availability of food and other deer migrate into the area.

- *Deer control: Hunting alone is not getting it done January 8, 2012 Connecticut, Wilton Bulletin. Patricia Sesto: “If we harvest 300 a year it could take us maybe seven years.... But of course that does not include baby deer, which tend to come in twos.” [Wilton’s deer cull program has been in place since 2,000. The city has been unable to control the deer population to their satisfaction with a cull. The deer density goal, ostensibly designed to reduce Lyme disease, is not supported by the disease ecology literature or the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC)]*
- *Deer production at Hopland Field Station, Guy E. Connolly, University of California William M. Longhurst, University of California California Agriculture 29(6):8-9. DOI: 10.3733/ca.v029n06p8. June 1975. “The heavier removal from the Hopland Field Station had no discernible effect on deer numbers, but fawn production and survival on the station were higher than elsewhere in the county. These records show that California deer populations can produce many more deer than are currently being taken with bucks-only hunting and very limited antlerless hunting.”*
- *Reproductive Dynamics and Disjunct White-tailed Deer Herds in Florida, Richter & Labisky, J. Wildl. Manage. 49(4):964-971 (1985). “incidence of twinning was 38% on hunted herds and 14% on nonhunted sites.”*
- *Wildlife Ecology and Management, William Robinson. “Harvesting reduces the population size, but the reduction results in an increase in the growth rate of the population. This increase in growth rate is brought about because of higher birth rates and lower death rates resulting from decreased competition for resources. This increased growth rate provides a surplus of individuals above the number required to replace the population, and this surplus can be harvested.”*
- *Restoring America’s Wildlife: 1937-1987, Robert L. Downing, wildlife biologist, publisher of over 25 scientific papers on deer. “Hunting mortality is believed to be largely compensatory partly because it takes place before the harsh winter period, when most natural deer deaths occur. Because hunting keeps deer density below maximum, the deer surviving a hunt have more food (better habitat) and come through the winter in better condition than those in unhunted herds.”*
- *An Assessment of Deer Hunting in New Jersey, New Jersey Fish and Game 1990. “that even during hunting seasons in which killing female deer was the objective (antlerless seasons), the remaining females had increased birthrates that not only replaced the ones killed, but increased the overall size of the herd.”*
- *Wildlife Fertility Control: Frequently Asked Questions on Immunocontraception. PNC, Inc. “By keeping the deer population below the carrying capacity of the available habitat, more forage (nutrition) is available per deer. Thus, does are healthier, reproductive success is higher and more does are able to carry two fawns. Ironically, this can result in a greater deer harvest each year. Depending on the relationship of the population and the carrying capacity, ‘an optimum sustained yield’ can be achieved where a relatively high reproductive rate allows an abundant harvest each fall.”*
- *Quality Deer Management: Guidelines for Implementation, 6. Agricultural Extension Service, The University of Tennessee. “With high-quality habitat and increased nutrition, the percentage of doe fawns that breed their first fall increases (sometimes up to 25 percent). Also, a higher percentage of yearling does produce two fawns instead of one. Because fawns are born at approximately a 1:1 sex ratio, more bucks may be born each year. Therefore, in some areas, you actually can increase the number of bucks born by shooting more does.”*
- *Restoring Americas Wildlife: 1937-1987, Dr. Tony J. Peterle, former Professor of Zoology at Ohio State University and former Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Wildlife Management. “Population models show that about 30 percent of a healthy deer population including does - can be harvested each year without reducing the next years population.”*

4 Why does the hunting farce continue?

There are two sources fueling it. First, hunters like to kill: they enjoy their ‘sport’. Second, politicians like to appear to do some sort of ‘good’: they like to protect the population from a menace like Bambi.

Therefore, a scapegoat is created via excuses like aggressive deer, flower eating deer, excreting deer. The population is immediately reduced. The hunter is satisfied and the politician looks good as the carcasses are removed. But the deer return and the ritual keeps being repeated.

Who foots the bill? You the taxpayer.