

“In just the past few decades, for the first time since the last Ice Age, huge swaths of the whitetail’s historic range have been put off-limits to hunting by deer’s biggest predator. Man.”
—Jim Sterba, author, Nature Wars

Way Beyond Lyme

By Dr. John Rasweiler, Cornell-trained reproductive physiologist, member of Suffolk County Tick Control Advisory Committee.

According to the CDC and New York State Department of Health, reported cases of tick-borne diseases—often difficult to treat and sometimes deadly—are higher on eastern Long Island than in other parts of the state and elsewhere in the U.S. The cause is clear: Ticks are hosted by an exploding population of white-tailed deer, which urban sprawl has provided with abundant food while removing all natural predators. The state’s Department of Environmental Conservation puts the current number of deer in Suffolk County between 25,000 and 35,000. *(based on estimates from 2004 to 2012).*



Deer with heavily tick-infested ears. (photo: Peter Priolo)

Although small mammals feed and can infect ticks with several serious diseases, the former generally deny adult ticks the blood necessary to take them to their mature reproductive stage. (See “7 Biggest Myths About Deer.”) In addition to Lyme, we are currently at significant risk of contracting other tick-transmitted diseases—e.g., anaplasmosis, babesiosis (the majority of cases in New York State are reported by Suffolk County), *Borrelia miyamotoi*, ehrlichiosis—as well as a southern tick-associated rash and a tick-triggered allergy (alpha-gal) to some red meat. Finally, new diseases or tick species could be introduced into our area at any time via humans, pets, or migratory wildlife.

**The Hunter,
Part of Our Eco-System**

*“I take pride in being an ethical hunter.
... Most hunters are also conservationists,
helping nature to stay in balance.”*

Woodlands Are Being Decimated

By Bill Toedter, former Executive Director of the North Fork Environmental Council.

On Eastern Long Island, an out-of-control deer population has now destroyed nearly all of the tree seedlings, bushes, wildflowers, and ground cover plants—the understory—in our forests. Along with the severely damaged understory, the fact that no new trees are growing to replace the old ones means that many of our songbirds have fewer safe places to nest, feed, and escape from predators. Birds like the Eastern Towhee are denser on deer-free Plum Island than in deer-damaged environments of the North Fork. In many areas, the understory has been extensively replaced by harmful invasive plants such as wild garlic mustard, which is directly spread by deer, and mile-a-minute vine.



Healthy forest understory on Plum Island. (photo: John Rasweiler)



Deer-decimated understory in Ruth Oliva Preserve, East Marion, less than eight miles from Plum Island. (photo: Tom Rawinski)

Our Waters Are Under Threat

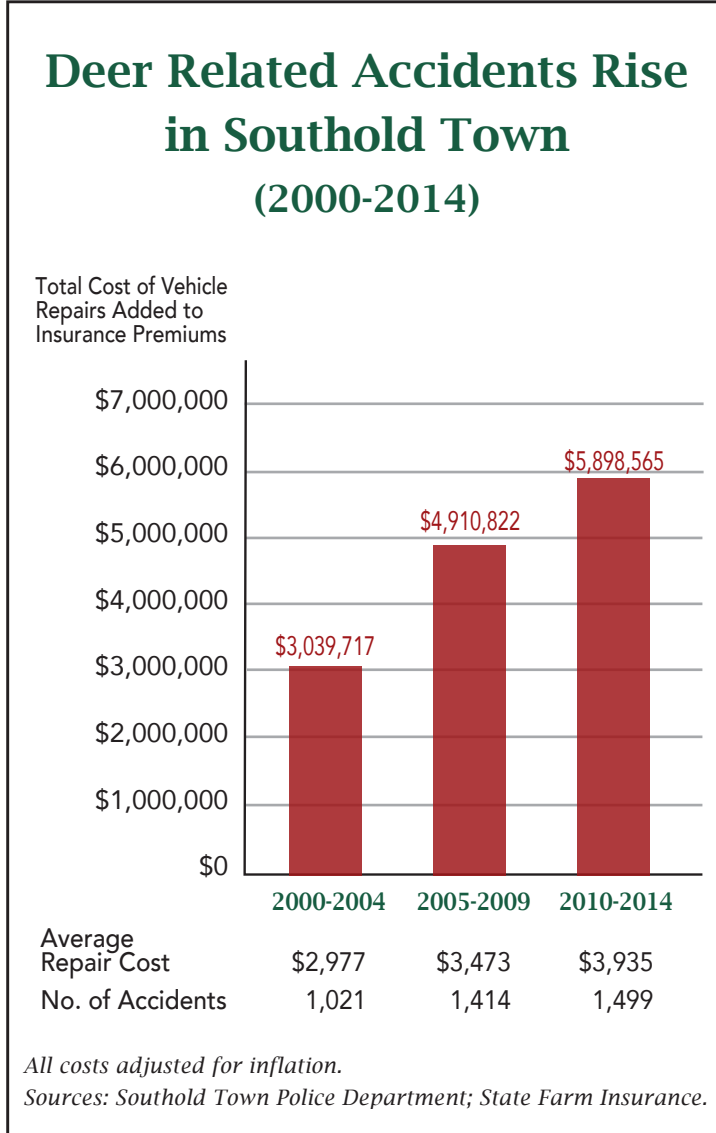
By John Bredemeyer, President of the Southold Town Trustees and Chairman of Southold Town Shellfish Advisory Committee.

Over-browsing of native vegetation by deer, as well as their trail damage to headlands and bluffs, have also dramatically increased soil erosion and water runoff on the East End. Recent studies by the Southold Town Shellfish Advisory Committee found elevated levels of fecal bacteria, originating from wildlife, in our waterways, sometimes rendering those waters unacceptable for shellfish harvesting and potentially unsafe for bathing.

Cars + Deer = A Costly Combo

By John Severini, Co-chair of North Fork Deer Alliance, founder and CEO of GP Consulting.

The chance of hitting a deer in Southold is 3.5 times the national average, which translates into one deer collision annually for every 63 locally registered drivers. In 2015, the Southold Town police department logged almost 300 vehicle-deer collisions, accounting for 25 percent of all auto accidents. (That number reflects an increase of almost 65 percent over the year 2000, when only 144 accidents were reported.) Says Southold Police Chief Martin Flatley: “In peak season, October through December, it’s not uncommon to have two accidents reported in one eight-hour shift.” In addition, figures on roadside carcass removal show that 60% of deer-vehicle collisions go unreported. Last year 388 deer carcasses were removed from Town roads. That venison, if harvested by hunters instead of cars, could be donated to food pantries instead of thrown into the town landfill.



According to **State Farm**, if you carry liability-only auto insurance and hit a deer, you are responsible for the full amount of the repair charges. The average cost for such a strike in 2015 was \$4,135, which brought the annual bill for all Southold drivers to \$1,604,380.

Venison, a Community Service
During hunting season, the Town of Southold provides a drop-off center for harvested deer, with the processed venison (30,000 pounds since 2008) donated to food pantries.



Deer-damaged crops. (photo: Tom Rawinski)

Financial Impact on Agriculture

By Thomas Wickham, former Southold Town Supervisor and owner of Wickham’s Fruit Farm in Cutchogue.

For North Fork farmers, deer damage isn’t just a nuisance, it’s a blow to their livelihoods, with crop damage resulting from a combination of browsing, plant destruction, and contamination. Farmers operating with unfenced fields estimate average crop losses of 10% due to browsing. More serious damage comes from bucks breaking off young trees or branches rubbing the “velvet” from their antlers. To make matters worse, farmers must now contend with a third potential source of deer damage: contamination from animal waste, primarily from deer. Eventually, the Federal Food Safety Modernization Act will require all but the smallest fruit and vegetable producers to guarantee the safety of food harvested from any fields contaminated by deer feces. Farmers have responded with fencing and by taking out some of the herd on their lands; while both methods offer some protection, neither has significantly slowed the continued growth of the deer population. Meanwhile, fencing not only concentrates more deer on everyone else’s property but also alters the traditional North Fork aesthetic of open farmland.

What Can I Do to Help?
 Email northfokdeer@gmail.com to help find a hunter for your property. Note that hunters on plots with fewer than 10 acres can use only bows and arrows and cannot hunt within 150 feet of a neighbor’s property without consent. (500 feet for shotguns on 10 acres or more).