

“In heavily populated areas, deer should be managed as part of an overall health emergency, not protected as an endangered natural resource. The well-being of human beings must come first.” —Dr. John Rasweiler

An Exploding Health Crisis ...and the Way to Solve It

The reduction of deer populations through a combination of recreational hunting and culling by sharpshooters is the best way for Southold to control its deer problem and subsequent health emergency, a conclusion drawn from a 2015 Cornell University study (available at bit.ly/298bn5T). Trapping (or chemical immobilization of deer by darting) followed by euthanasia with drugs or penetrating bolt pistols is also an option. Although none of these methods inflict pain or prolonged suffering on the deer, their most appropriate use is in heavily populated areas, where hunting is impossible.

The following approaches—either impractical, unaffordable or undesirable—simply do not work for the North Fork:

Yard Spraying

While the use of acaricides can reduce tick populations, it also harms bees, butterflies, and other beneficial organisms. Realistically, we cannot spray the entire North Fork, and it takes only brief exposure to an untreated area to pick up ticks.

Four-poster De-ticking Stations

These devices reduce but do not eliminate ticks in their immediate vicinity. However, a reduction in the cases of tick-borne diseases in humans has not yet been demonstrated. Furthermore, four-posters are supposed to be deployed at a density of one station per 40-50 acres impossible in the Town of Southold because of New York State restrictions that forbid deployment close to occupied buildings, playgrounds (unless fenced-in), or roads. Deployment on farms or in orchards would be incompatible with the new Federal Food Safety Modernization Act.

Fertility Control

Two different approaches, surgical sterilization and the administration of a contraceptive vaccine, have been tried on the Cornell campus and Fire Island but failed to reduce deer to environmentally acceptable levels. These approaches are not only impractical but also unaffordable. It costs a minimum of \$500 to capture and vaccinate—more than \$1,000 to sterilize—each deer. With the vaccine, recapture is necessary after a year (again, at high cost) for booster shots, and more than 90% of the herd must be treated within a three-year period to significantly limit the birth of untreated young. Even if such fertility controls made sense, tick levels would remain intolerably high for years.

7 BIGGEST MYTHS ABOUT DEER

1. The deer were here first.

No. Historically deer and man have always co-existed. But as we continue to eliminate their natural predators while also providing an abundant supply of food—our backyards—deer proliferate at the expense of our health, safety, and natural environment.

2. Ticks would still be a problem, even if there were no deer.

Not true. Immature black-legged ticks feed on certain small mammals (e.g., white-footed mice), known as **reservoir hosts**, where the ticks become infected with the organism responsible for Lyme disease but cannot reach maturity. In contrast, deer serve as **reproductive hosts**, feeding many hundreds of ticks to adulthood after which they drop off to lay thousands of eggs—a multiplier effect that puts deer at the heart of our current epidemic.

3. Deer hunting is inhumane.

Professional deer management is far more humane than letting animals go blind from periocular tick infections or be killed (or maimed to die elsewhere) by vehicles.

4. The deer population can be managed by recreational hunters alone.

Cornell studies show that about 66% of the deer population would have to be removed each year to reduce the herds to sustainable levels in the Town of Southold. At best, recreational hunters currently harvest less than 25% of the local herd each year.

5. Fertility control is the best option.

New York State bars sterilization or contraception as a deer-management tool except in studies leading to new scientific knowledge—a high bar to cross. (See “An Exploding Health Crisis” to learn more.)

6. We’d have fewer accidents if everyone drove slower.

Deer will jump into the paths of cars at any speed and without warning—especially dangerous at dusk and dawn—causing 25% of all road accidents in our town.

7. Nature will take care of the problem.

Not a myth at all, but only when new predators, diseases, or starvation take their toll ... or if man resumes his historical role as primary predator.

BE PART OF THE SOLUTION

As much of the land in Southold Town is privately owned, management by private landowners is extremely important in reducing the local deer population. If you have a parcel that routinely hosts a large number of deer and are interested in having an experienced hunter on your property, please contact NFDA at northforkdeer@gmail.com so that we can assist you.

How Safe Is Bow Hunting?

In the past 15 years, there have been only two incidents involving bow hunting in New York State—one self-inflicted and the other between two hunters themselves, according to the state’s Department of Environmental Conservation, which has never documented an incident involving an archer and a bystander.

MISSION

North Fork Deer Alliance (NFDA) is dedicated to promoting the return of the local deer population to levels compatible with human health, the environment, and the economy.



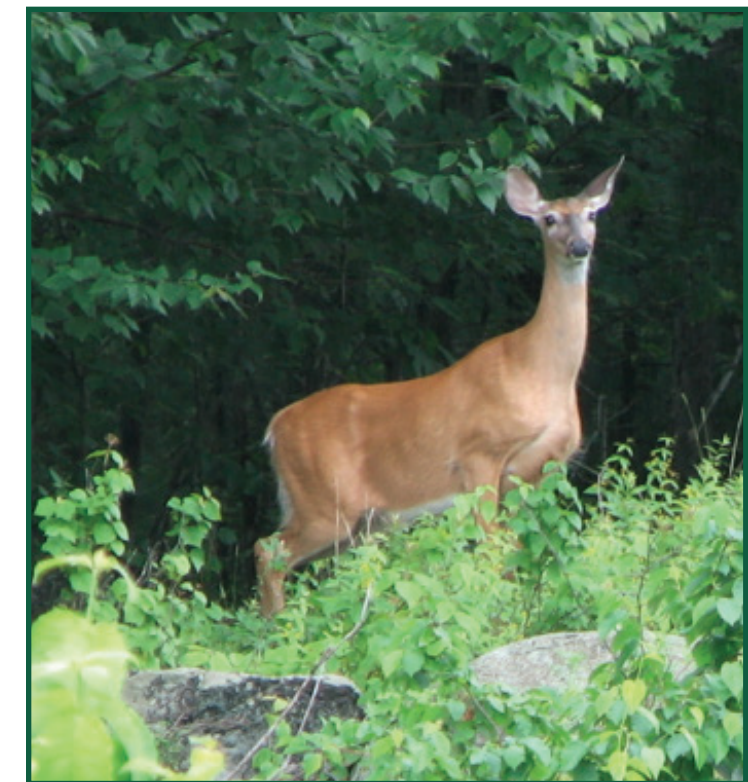
The lady's slipper orchid once flourished on the North Fork. Today, threatened by deer, it is on the verge of local extinction. (photo: Tom Rawinski)

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We thank the *Suffolk Times* for publishing six NFDA (formerly NFDMA) guest editorials (Nov. 2014-Jan. 2015) on the subject of deer impact on our people, animals, lands, forests and waters. Archived at tinyurl.com/pat7132

WE HAVE TOO MANY DEER!



TOO MANY tick-borne diseases
TOO MANY auto accidents
TOO MUCH destruction to our forests
TOO MUCH contamination of our waters
TOO MUCH economic devastation

