

"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*

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.



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

Although small mammals like white-footed mice, in their roles as **reservoir hosts**, can feed and infect immature ticks with diseases such as Lyme, they generally deny adult ticks the blood necessary to take them to their mature reproductive stage. Deer, though, do exactly the latter in their role as **reproductive hosts**. And Lyme is not the only thing to worry about: We are now at 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, and what's known as southern tick-associated rash illness, as well as a potentially fatal tick-triggered allergy to some red meat. Deer (not mice) are the **reservoir hosts** for the organism causing human monocytic ehrlichiosis, which can be a very dangerous disease. This organism is transmitted from the deer by lone star ticks (now extremely common in our area). Deer can support all stages of lone star tick development and are also the principal **reproductive hosts** for the adult ticks.

"Deer serve as reproductive hosts for ticks, feeding many hundreds of them 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."

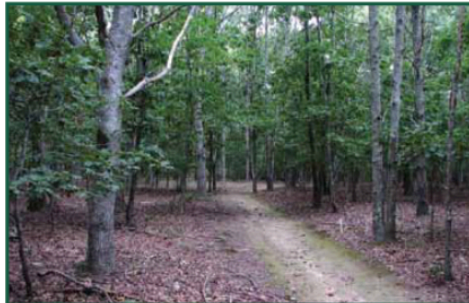
Woodlands Are Being Decimated*

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. In addition to stopping essential forest regeneration, 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*

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

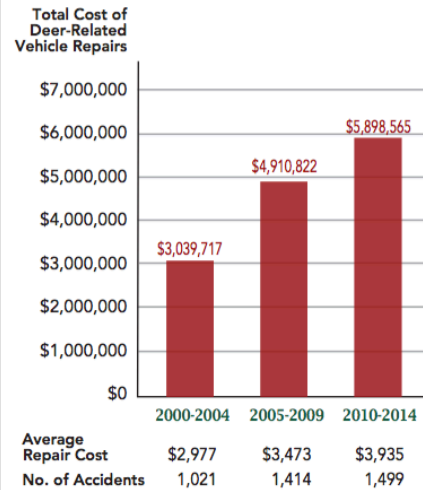
Over-browsing of native vegetation by deer, as well as their trail damage to headlands and bluffs, have also dramatically increased soil erosion and water runoff on the East End. Recent studies by the Southold Town Shellfish Advisory Committee found elevated levels of fecal bacteria, originating from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

Cars + Deer = A Costly Combo*

John Severini, Founder and CEO of GP Consulting and Environmentalist

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 deer-vehicular collisions, accounting for about 25% of all accidents. (That number reflects an increase of almost 65% 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 30% 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.

Deer Related Accidents Rise in Southold Town (2000-2014)



All costs adjusted for inflation.

Sources: Southold Town Police Department; State Farm Insurance.

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.



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)

Financial Impact on Agriculture*

Thomas Wickham, owner of Wickham's Fruit Farm and former Southold Town Councilman and Supervisor.

For farmers on the North Fork, 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 unfenced fields estimate average crop losses of 10% due to browsing. Additional damage comes from bucks breaking off young trees or branches while rubbing the "velvet" from their antlers. To make matters worse, farmers must now contend with a third source of deer damage: contamination from animal waste. The new Federal Food Safety Modernization Act will require all but the smallest fruit and vegetable producers to take steps to prevent this. While farmers have responded with fencing and by taking out some of the herd on their lands, neither method 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 northforkdeer@gmail.com to find a hunter for your property. Note that our archers use only bows and arrows and cannot hunt within 150 feet of an occupied dwelling or farm building without the property owner's approval.

**These sections have been summarized in part from guest editorials originally published in The Suffolk Times between Nov. 2014 and April 2015 and contain additional material provided by the NFDA.*