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Cull of the Wild

By [THE EDITORIAL BOARD](#)

In eastern Long Island, especially in and around the town of East Hampton, the privet hedges, gentle dunes and white-seashell paths present a vision of a natural world tamed and tailored to the high aesthetic standards of the finest fashion and home-décor magazines. It's a bit of English countryside, but with bigger cars.

Yet even here, wild nature is not fully subdued. For evidence, one can visit the area's auto body shops and doctor's offices to see what happens when too many whitetail deer occupy too small a human-dominated habitat. Suburban deer in huge numbers have denuded farm fields and garden plots, caused thousands of car collisions and contributed to the spread of Lyme disease, a debilitating illness borne by ticks that live on deer. Years of mounting agricultural losses and the threat to human health and safety have finally led East Enders to drastic measures — [to cull the deer with hired marksmen](#).

With help from East Hampton Town and East Hampton Village and other communities, the Long Island Farm Bureau is enlisting wildlife-control officials at the Department of Agriculture to kill about 2,000 to 3,000 deer this winter. The slaughter is to begin in February, after hunting season ends, and last a few weeks. Marksmen in elevated stands plan to lure deer to baited stations, firing downward to minimize danger. They may also use traps.

Deer fanciers have sued to block the hunt, calling it barbaric, but they should acknowledge that other things are deplorable, too, like emaciated deer from overabundant herds, and humans sickened by Lyme disease. The predators that would control this situation are gone, and unless Long Islanders want to live with wolves, coyotes, bears and mountain lions, they will have to assume responsibility for their place atop the food chain. Nonlethal solutions, like deer contraception, are expensive, slow and unreliable. "When a population is this far out of balance," says Allen Gosser of the Agriculture Department, referring to deer, "you need a cull before you can implement other measures," like birth control.

For deer, suburbia is a 24-hour salad bar. Shooting them is naturally unnerving to people who hate that the American way of solving problems so often involves guns. But other, more palatable solutions have failed.

Yes, Long Islanders should plant deer-resistant gardens and put up high fences and install lights to keep deer off the roads and keep checking their ankles and shins for deer ticks. But in a confined island space overrun with deer, a targeted, professional cull to get these animals finally under control — and to supply large amounts of venison for the poor — seems like a reasonable option to help resolve a great unnatural imbalance.

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