

The Need For Deer Management

Increasing concern about deer-related problems indicates that deer populations in some areas of the county have exceeded an optimum density called the carrying capacity. Carrying capacity can be determined by three different standards. Biological carrying capacity is the population density that cannot be supported by the available habitat. Catastrophic mortality, from such causes as starvation, stress, diseases and parasites, and reproductive failure, produce a dramatic decline in the population and poor health in the surviving individuals. Ecological carrying capacity is that deer density at which we see damage to the forest ecosystem, impacting the populations of plants and other wildlife species, forest regeneration and water quality. Cultural carrying capacity is reached when the deer population is high enough to cause widespread conflict with the nearby human population. If nothing is done to stabilize or reduce the deer population, conflicts will likely increase with both citizens and deer suffering as a result. In Howard County, the cultural and ecological carrying capacities have apparently been exceeded, but we have not arrived at the biological carrying capacity on a widespread basis.

Dealing with Deer - Human Conflict

Howard County's Comprehensive Deer Management plan addresses actions that can help reduce deer-human conflicts but cannot eliminate them. Deer are very adaptable animals and will continue to thrive in Howard County. Here are some ways to help reduce and prevent deer problems.

Damage to Agricultural Crops, Gardens and Ornamental Plantings

Damage prevention alternatives for homeowners and agriculturalists include mechanical noise producing devices, chemical repellents, and fencing. Homeowners can choose to landscape their property with plants that are not favored by deer (a list is available through the Cooperative Extension Service). Farmers experiencing crop damage are encouraged to open their land to hunting and/or obtain deer management permits to reduce the number of deer on their property. For information on establishing a hunting program on your property or obtaining deer management permits contact DNR at 301-258-7308. To report deer related problems and receive information about controlling damage call the Nuisance Animal Information Line 877-463-6497. A booklet titled *Controlling Deer Damage in Maryland* is available from the Howard County Cooperative Extension Service at 410-313-2707. It is also contained in the Deer Management Reference Manual available in all Howard County Public Libraries. The Reference Manual has been updated (2004) and contains several pieces of literature that can help you understand and adapt to the current deer abundance situation.

Automobile/Deer Collisions - Driving tips

Be Alert! Deer are most active at dawn and dusk.

Watch for deer where roads pass through wooded and agricultural areas.

Deer crossing signs indicate where heavily used deer trails cross roadways. Slow down and watch for eye-shine of deer near the road edges.

Be especially cautious during seasons of high deer activity: October to January (the breeding season) and June (when yearlings are seeking new territories).

Don't use high beam headlights, which temporarily blind deer.

Watch for more deer following the first one that you see. Many times deer travel in groups.

Obey the speed limit, particularly at night in areas with deer crossing signs.

There is no evidence that "deer whistles" attached to a car actually reduce the occurrence of collisions.

Lyme Disease

Lyme disease is an infectious illness that is transmitted to animals and humans by the bite of the black-legged tick (*Ixodes scapularis*). This parasite is tiny, about the size of a pinhead. Although this tick feeds on many animals including mice and domestic animals, there is evidence that suggests an increased deer population can increase the number of ticks in an area. The best defense against this disease is protection against the ticks. For more information and a brochure on Lyme disease and its prevention call The Center for Disease Control at 1-800-886-5963.

Damage to Natural Areas

White-tailed deer are herbivores (plant eaters) and feed primarily on leaves, buds and twigs. An average sized deer eats six to eight pounds of plant material a day. An overabundance of deer can have a profound impact on native vegetation, forest regeneration and wildlife habitat. Areas of extreme overpopulation may begin to show a "browse line" where, even in mid-summer, there is little vegetation on the forest floor and the trees and shrubs look as if they have been neatly clipped of all leaves up to about five feet high. When this happens, young trees are not produced and habitat for nesting forest birds and other wildlife is destroyed. The only way to protect natural areas is to manage the number of deer.

How Can You Help?

Just by reading this information, you are helping to improve the deer situation in Howard County. Education is the best tool for understanding how to lessen deer/human conflicts in your life. By accepting that humans must learn to co-exist in close quarters with deer, and taking appropriate actions on your property or while driving your car, you can help reduce conflicts. Use the telephone numbers in this brochure to notify the appropriate officials so they can get a more accurate picture of problems and where they exist. More information and data will help officials to better track the results of deer management efforts.

But the most important thing residents can do is to realize that there can be too much of a good thing when it comes to deer. Your support for the county's deer management efforts can help ensure that we will live in harmony with the white-tailed deer and it will remain a cherished part of our county's natural heritage

For more information on Howard County's Comprehensive Deer Management Plan contact Phil Norman at pnorman@howardcountymd.gov .