

Deer - Frequently Asked Questions

1. Are deer overpopulated?

Deer are a self-regulating species whose numbers are dependent upon the available food and habitat supply. Throughout all of New Jersey, deer have not exceeded their biological carrying capacity, which is the maximum number of individuals the ecosystem can sustain, given the food, habitat, water, and other necessities available. The cultural carrying capacity is a subjective number based on what people will tolerate. Nonlethal deer conflict and impact management are crucial to resolving carrying capacity concerns.

The Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) agrees deer are not biologically overpopulated. In fact, according to the DFW's website, deer are decreasing. state.nj.us/dep/fgw/chkmamls.htm

2. Why is hunting ineffective at preventing car accidents with deer?

Several factors affect car accidents. Erie Indemnity Company: "Nearly half of all deer/vehicle collisions happen between October and December. Not coincidentally, deer mating season and peak hunting days also fall between these months. As deer are running from hunters or looking for a mate... odds are they'll cross a road somewhere in between."¹ So, in densely populated areas, deer run across roadways. Deer also expand their home range when hunted. Nonlethal conflict and impact management techniques provide real solutions. This includes signage, better lighting, feeding bans, removing vegetation debris from roadsides, slower speed limits, creating safe wildlife crossings, and more.

These are Federal Highway Administration recommendations. The most common causes of motor vehicle accidents in the United States resulting in personal injury and death are distracted driving, weather/road conditions, failure to stop or yield at a red light/stop sign, failure to obey traffic laws, drunk driving, road rage, unsafe speed, reckless/careless driving, teenagers and tailgating. Note: Deer are not on this list.

3. Why is hunting ineffective at curtailing Lyme disease?

Independent, peer-reviewed research has absolved deer of any significant role in the transmission of Lyme disease. Sources include Cary Institute's Tick Project, Harvard's School of Public Health, even the Pennsylvania Game Commission. The Yale School of Public Health reported that the infection rate was not significantly different before and after deer hunts. After deer kills, said Harvard, Lyme infections "went up."²

Research is yielding more surprises: Deer are not the main culprit; acorn crops and white-footed mice are major drivers of recent spikes in infection. The opossum is an unsung hero in the battle against Lyme, eating up to 5000 ticks per week; so is the fox and other small predators, whose mere presence keeps mice at bay.

4. Why is deer baiting bad for the environment and our communities?

Baiting or feeding:

- Increases fertility in deer.
- Causes habituation/conflicts.
- Enhances the spread of disease.
- Changes behavioral patterns, which increases the potential of auto collisions with deer.
- Increases predation of ground-nesting birds by attracting small predators.
- Spreads invasive and exotic seeds.
- Contributes to forest degeneration by concentrating deer, who in turn feed on natural vegetation.

Given the issues baiting causes, limiting feeding bans to the non-hunting public is a half-measure and ineffective.

5. What nonlethal methods are available?

DFW's rejection of a nonlethal sterilization program in Saddle River in 2018 does not eliminate other nonlethal deer conflict and impact management tools, such as:

- Stop practices, such as prescribed burns, clear-cutting, and planting various crops favored by deer, increase the quality

and quantity of food available, thereby increasing the land's carrying capacity to accommodate more deer.

- Eliminate artificial food sources such as baiting, planting food plots for deer by farmers, and backyard feeding (corn, bird feeders, salt licks, etc.). Enact local ordinances that prevent deer feeding and baiting in affected towns and encourage legislators to enact legislation that bans the practice statewide.
- End practices that cause deer to leave their natural habitat and roam into neighboring towns:
 - Develop a plan to reduce or eliminate invasive plants, which can affect deer migration into surrounding areas.
 - Female deer expand their range by 30% due to hunting pressure. Eliminate hunting.
 - Restrict or reduce development projects.
- The installation of electric fencing as an exclusion method is effective, and most kits are inexpensive. Homeowners may not want to erect an 8-foot high fence, so it is an individual choice depending on the landscape and needs.
- Reduce the risk of vehicle/deer collisions by lowering speed limits in targeted areas, increasing lighting and signage, and employing electronic signs.
- Homeowner education about deer-resistant plants.
 - <https://njaes.rutgers.edu/deer-resistant-plants/>
- Commercial and homemade deer repellents. To increase effectiveness, reapply and change frequently.
- In New Jersey, deer are not biologically overpopulated. If deer need additional help, fertility control is available.



Fact: Surgical sterilization is in use throughout the country. The *Washington Post* reports that nonlethal is catching on.³ San Jose saw a 40 percent drop in black-tailed deer within two years and was ultimately too successful, erasing reproduction. In Maryland, the National Institutes of Health had “overwhelming support, with many employees applauding what they saw was a humane approach to our problem.”

The New Jersey Senate helped register Gonacon, a fertility vaccine, for use in New Jersey, over ten years ago. Fertility control is highly effective, with rates up to 80% efficacy. In contrast, hunting stimulates the fertility rate of deer by removing competitors for food and available habitat. Fertility control products that are in use elsewhere have moved out of the experimental phase.⁴ DFW needs to encourage nonlethal conflict and impact management and embrace newer, more effective technologies instead of catering to its hunter-client base's needs.

6. Who pays for nonlethal deer conflict and impact management?

Most of the nonlethal deer conflict and impact methods listed below are inexpensive, yielding a higher efficacy rate than annual killing programs. Fertility control methods can be initially expensive, but when measured against its high effectiveness, it can be a long-term solution with reduced future costs. Humane organizations and residents fully funded the Saddle River fertility control proposal prior to the DFW's rejection.

7. What are the consequences of a hunting program?

Hunting leads to a higher fertility rate in deer, thereby providing only a short-term solution. Hunting decreases the herd one year and increases it the next. It's called compensatory rebound, a well-documented population dynamic. Many complex factors, including nutrition and herd density, determines the number of fawns born. With competition for food reduced by a sudden drop in herd numbers, younger fawns will breed, and females will give birth to twins and triplets instead of single fawns. Productivity was higher on hunted than on nonhunted sites. Incidence of twinning was 38% on hunted and 14% on nonhunted sites.⁵

Hunting programs lead to divisiveness in the community, lower property values, safety concerns, and a false sense of security. Wildlife advocates can provide solutions and bring volunteers into the community to help reduce conflicts with deer. Nonlethal deer conflict and impact management are gaining momentum across the country. Town officials should embrace this energetic volunteer resource.

8. Do all hunters have to pass a safety course?

No, the state allows “apprentice hunters” to hunt without taking a safety course with a licensed hunter. Ten to thirteen-year-olds can hunt for free but must be with an adult, at least 21 years old.

9. Is bow hunting safer than guns?

All weapons are dangerous to people, pets, and wildlife. In 2017, a New Jersey crossbow hunter, who said he mistook a dog for a coyote, killed a family dog named Tonka.

10. Why is bow hunting cruel?

Bowhunting of deer with traditional weapons has a 50% wounding rate.⁶ Wounded deer can travel for miles before they bleed out. In Saddle River, to its residents' horror, reports of deer found on other properties or not recovered occurred during its controversial bow hunt.

11. How popular are nonlethal deer conflict and impact management?

Surveys show that the majority of citizens want nonlethal methods employed. A non-binding resolution in Saddle River showed that 59% of the voters chose "nonlethal only" when asked in 2016. A Rutgers University poll in 2002 found that nearly 7 in 10 said the state should try to find nonlethal ways to reduce the deer population.

12. What about trap and transfer as a nonlethal solution?

Proponents of nonlethal deer conflict and impact management strategies do not recommend the trap and transfer of deer. Chronic wasting disease also precludes this as a viable option.

13. Why are deer whistles not recommended?

Deer whistles are not effective at reducing deer-car collisions. The whistles may not work, but sonic devices do. The Hornet Electronic Deer Avoidance system can be an effective tool to prevent car collisions with animals. <http://xp3hornet.com/>

14. What is a Deer Smart Community program?

It is a comprehensive humane approach to handle conflicts with deer, which includes but is not limited to:

- Public education on deer
- Conflict, impact, and attractant management
- Restoring wildlife habitat in communities
- Wildlife feeding bans that include baiting
- Plant and forest health education
- Deer-resistant plant sales and education
- Invasive and exotic seed removal programs
- Habitat Modification along roadways
- Erect wildlife crossings in new construction and during repairs to highway infrastructure
- Fencing (including modifying height limit on town ordinances)
- Reducing speed limits
- Signage and increased lighting where deer are present
- Protection of small mammals, such as opossums to prevent Lyme disease
- Prevention of Lyme disease through public educational seminars
- Fertility control educational seminars



¹ <https://www.erieinsurance.com/blog/deer-myths> (Accessed 4/21/2021.)

² <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/features/killing-deer-not-answer-reducing-lyme-disease-html/> (Accessed 4/21/2021.)

³ https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/at-the-nih-white-tailed-deer-get-sterilized-in-luxurious-surgery-rooms/2014/12/24/0b4eb23e-8ae0-11e4-8ff4-fb93129c9c8b_story.html?utm_term=.4cddb98ecab9 (Accessed 4/21/2021.)

⁴ http://www.wildliferescueinc.org/nonlethal_deer_project.html

⁵ Richter, A., & Labisky, R. (1985). Reproductive Dynamics among Disjunct White-Tailed Deer Herds in Florida. *The Journal of Wildlife Management*, 49(4), 964-971. doi:10.2307/3801380

⁶ Ditchkoff, Stephen & R. Welch, Edgar & L. Lochmiller, Robert & Masters, Ronald & R. Starry, William & C. Dinkines, William & Lincoln, N. (2007). Wounding Rates of White-tailed Deer with Traditional Archery Equipment.