

Did You Know That hunting deer is a time-honored tradition that puts food on the table and helps to restore the balance of the natural environment.

There are over thirty million deer in the United States, about a hundred times more than just a century ago. There is no other wild large animal that is so plentiful or as geographically widespread as the white-tailed deer.

A century ago white-tailed deer were nearly extirpated across most of America. To help bring them back from the brink, wildlife agencies and private citizens conducted hundreds of long-distance restocking operations over a period of decades. Deer have had four million years to evolve and get ready for us. Their senses are far more acute than ours, they're faster and more agile than we are. Deer are capable of adapting to changing situations, they are survivors.

But despite their speed, agility, stealth, and incredibly acute senses, very few deer die of old age. In the northeast, they freeze and starve during long, cold winters. Some winters 80-90 percent of the casualties are fawns. In most areas of the country, predators are responsible for keeping deer density levels in check. That is not the case here on Shelter Island where there are no wolves, bobcats, bears, or coyotes. Even though hunters harvest several hundred deer each year and motor vehicle

accidents account for several dozen deaths, the deer herd continues to flourish.

Here in North America, hunting and fishing licenses provide much of the funding for wildlife conservation and habitat improvement. Although the number of hunters in the United States continues to fall, there are still millions of Americans that hunt big game every year, most of which are deer hunters. Their equipment has become more sophisticated and expensive. Bow hunting success depended on serious muscle and continuous practice. But the development of the modern compound bows have changed all of that. When bow hunters draw a seventy-pound compound bow, it takes only fourteen pounds of force to hold it at full draw. This makes it relatively easy to linger at full draw while waiting for just the right moment to release an arrow and effect a clean kill.

Hunting deer on Shelter Island is truly a time-honored tradition. Unfortunately, fewer young people are getting involved in hunting. Nevertheless, the vast majority of our local hunters still value venison and stock their freezers throughout the hunting season. Some of the hunters also donate their venison to food kitchens and freezers that are found at the Shelter Island Recycling Center.

Obviously, these hunters volunteer their time, money and effort to help manage the herd. The Shelter Island Deer and Tick Committee will continue to periodically meet with local hunters and listen to their suggestions.

In addition, the committee has placed ads in the local paper asking landowners to open their properties to hunting, extended bow season through January (Oct. 1st to Jan 31st), as well as holding safety courses for new and experienced hunters. Even “off-island” hunters are now allowed through the “buddy program” to hunt on the island. The committee is committed to working with our hunting community in achieving its goals.

While opening up hunting on weekends in January, the new legislation, shepherded by Assemblyman Fred Thiele Jr. and Senator Kenneth LaValle, makes clear that it’s not limited to shotgun hunters or those using muzzle loaded firearms. It’s also an expansion of the season (or, hunting days) for hunters using long bows. The new law is part of a three-bill package passed recently to enhance efforts to cull deer herds in greater numbers. The legislation was recommended by the State Department of Environmental Conservation and supported by East End town and village officials. In April (2014), the state legislature reduced the setback from buildings necessary to hunt from 500 feet to 150 feet. The third bill is still awaiting the governor’s signature and would require the state to include non-lethal fertility control as a part of the management plan to reduce proliferation of deer that are hosts for the ticks. Mr. Thiele stated, “the recent explosion of white-tailed deer on Eastern Long Island threatens public health, public safety, personal property and the environment.

Finally, the Shelter Island Deer and Tick Committee has expanded their “incentive program”, encouraging hunters to take additional deer. The program has been met with some successes and will be enhanced prior to October 2015. The problem of deer overabundance is a problem that can be solved here on Shelter Island but requires the cooperation of not only our hunters but our citizens as well. Be part of the solution.

References:

Deerland – “America’s Hunt for Ecological Balance and the Essence of Wildness” by Al Cambronne @2013

New York State Deer Management Plan – Goal 2: Hunting & Recreation, 2012

James Read, SI Police Chief Memo/SI Reporter Article by Julie Lane (August 2014)