

Wildlife Conflicts

Urban Deer

Deer, both Whitetail and mule deer, exist throughout most of Alberta. As deer populations expand and urban developments encroach into historical deer range, the existence of deer within urban developments and the associated human wildlife conflict increases. The feeding of deer by residents within these urban areas has long-term implications for deer. They include increased disease risk, habituation to humans, habitat destruction and increased wildlife vehicle collisions

Spread of disease

Supplemental feeding can result in large numbers of deer congregating in small areas. This can encourage the spread of diseases such as chronic wasting, lyme disease and tuberculosis through repeated and prolonged contact at feeding sights.

Habituation

Supplemental feeding can alter the natural avoidance tendencies of deer towards people. It can also reduce a deer's normal home range and lure them away from natural food sources and environments that would normally protect them from cold and predators. Luring them away from their natural habitat can cause deer to expend more energy than they are able to take in, resulting in energy loss at a time when energy conservation is key to their winter survival. Encouraging animals to move unnecessarily also increases wildlife vehicle collisions.



Habitual behaviour

Overall Health

Research suggests that a small well-fed herd of deer can produce more young than a larger herd that is poorly fed. Deer are best suited to feed on natural winter browse, gradually reducing their food intake through fall and winter and using up naturally built-up fat reserves throughout that time period. It can take weeks for animals to adjust to a new food source and effectively metabolize that new food source. Studies have shown that deer can experience trouble making that adjustment, often with fatal consequences.

Habitat Destruction

Feeding deer can potentially increase the number of deer short term. This can lead to long-term habitat destruction by over browsing, resulting in reduced carrying capacity of an area. This makes deer increasingly dependent on supplements, disrupting their natural feeding cycle. Weeds contained in feed can also be spread to more natural environments, encouraging the invasion of exotic plant species. Deer can also damage gardens and landscaping within residential areas.

Public Safety

Deer can become aggressive when defending a food source, and once deer and other wildlife become used to urban environments, they may choose to have young there as well. This can create safety concerns from females defending their young from local residents that are also using these urban green spaces. The presence of deer and their young can also attract predators such as cougars,



Habitual behaviour

coyotes, wolves and bears to these same urban environments, creating obvious safety concerns. It can also result in deer expending unnecessary energy in avoiding these predators at a time when energy conservation is key.

For more information

Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Media release of the Ecological and Human Social Effects of Artificial Feeding and Baiting of Wildlife (<http://news.usask.ca/media-release-pages/2014/university-of-saskatchewan-researcher-urges-caution-on-winter-feeding-of-wildlife.php>)

Hesse, G., British Columbia Urban Ungulate Conflict Analysis. March 2010. Prepared for British Columbia Ministry of Environment (<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/plants-animals-and-ecosystems/wildlife-wildlife-habitat/staying-safe-around-wildlife/urbanungulatessummaryreportfinaljune21-2010.pdf>)

Pennsylvania Gaming Commission, Please don't feed the deer brochure, 2012. http://www.pgc.pa.gov/Wildlife/WildlifeSpecies/White-tailedDeer/Documents/feeding_deer.pdf

Wildlife Society: Final position statement on the baiting and supplemental feeding of game wildlife species http://wildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/PS_BaitingandSupplementalFeeding.pdf

For additional information on how to prevent interactions with deer and other wildlife, please visit Alberta Environment and Parks/ Fish and Wildlife: <http://aep.alberta.ca/fish-wildlife/human-wildlife-conflict/default.aspx>

AEP, Chronic Wasting Disease: <http://aep.alberta.ca/fish-wildlife/wildlife-diseases/documents/ChronicWastingDisease-Oct2014.pdf> THIS LINK DOES NOT WORK