

The Algebra of Bambicide

It's really not a question of whether we'll have to cull the deer around the quarry. We definitely will. The only question is whether now or later, and how big and healthy a herd.

Some simple Math to start. In the absence of a population limiter, a deer herd grows by about 50% every year. If you have 20 deer today, half are female, they all get pregnant, each delivers one fawn, so next year you have 30 deer. There are some caveats to that – they may not be evenly male/female, not all the females may get pregnant, some may deliver twins – but the caveats tend to balance out.

So if we have 20 deer there now, and nothing happens to reduce their numbers, next year we have 30. The following year 45. Then 67. Then, 4 years from now, 100. Four years after that, 500. Four years after that, 2500. Because that's how exponential growth works.

So if we have 20 deer there now, and nothing happens to reduce their numbers, in a decade the south side will be overrun in deer – 11 or 12 hundred of them. Of course, that's not going to happen. The south side doesn't have adequate habitat to support 1100 deer. So numbers reduction is inevitable.

One way we'd reduce their numbers would be by hitting them with our cars. As the deer herd grows, it would have to expand more and more out of the woods around the quarry, at least at night, searching for food. Expanding across South Park Ave. and across Ninth, across Knapp and Koeller. Right across our paths. As their population grows, those crossings would become more frequent, and we would have more and more of those cute deer carcasses laying by the side of the road.

Deer population growth would then continue only until an equilibrium is reached. If the herd grows to 400, and has 200 fawns every Spring, and we run over 200 deer a year, that's an equilibrium. A particularly messy equilibrium.

Of course, that won't happen, because the south end doesn't have enough food to support that many deer all winter. So we would have die offs due to starvation. Unless a lot of kind people put out food for them. Then see the paragraph above on car/deer equilibrium.

Maybe we could just trap them, and release them into the wild. Fine, but what wild would that be? Where do we not already have abundant deer, whose population does not need to be controlled by hunting or car accidents or starvation? Is there some Disney movie nearby that we can release them into, to cavort with Thumper and Tweety Pie and the Seven Dwarfs? No? Just other places where the deer herd naturally grows by 50% each year? That's what I thought.

When you get right down to it, there's only one logical solution. We identify a reasonable target population – 5, 10, maybe 15 deer or so. A population small enough that the wooded area can support them; a population small enough that they won't overbrowse that wooded area, won't wipe out the natural plant diversity. (Or are our animal lovers not also plant lovers? Are a few more Bambis worth no more trilliums?)

And then we maintain that population in the most humane way possible. By shooting one third of them every Fall. So 12 deer raise 6 fawns, become 18, and get hunted back down to 12. A quick bullet through the chest, dead in a moment, no slow, prolonged starvation, no limping off, limbs shattered, to die of internal bleeding hours after the accident.

At least, that's how a humane realist would handle it. Shouldn't we?