



Perspective, can it cure amnesia?

LIFE is a grand teacher. And the older I get, the more I realize that life is all about perspective. At five, not getting that blue ball in Target was the end of the world, but after graduating high school, obtaining two advanced degrees, making a life in four different states thousands of miles from friends and family, getting married with all its up and downs, that blue ball is small potatoes.

But sometimes it's hard to see the forest for the trees. This is why I decided to take this trip through Pennsylvania's deer management history. Because it seems that many have amnesia when it comes to this subject. Amnesia has two main features: an impaired ability to learn new information, and an impaired ability to recall past events. Well, that fits.

Did you know that from 1915 to 1930 the total harvest during that period was 147,690 deer? Did you know from 1995 to 2010, deer agers checked 586,316 deer at processors? That's almost four times the total harvest from 1915-30. Three different aging teams each checked more than the entire 1915 harvest in one season. How's that for perspective?

In less than 15 years the mind-set of hunters went from three days of tracking and killing the "last deer in Pennsylvania" to vehement "opposition to the ruthless slaughter of does." Ross Leffler, a prominent figure in Game Commission and Pennsylvania conservation history, said, "Sportsmanly chivalry has become so deeply-rooted that we are finding the second step in game restoration the hardest — getting sportsmen to realize that it is just as important to limit the number of species to within its food supply..." That was in 1931. PDMA (Pennsylvania Deer Management Amnesia) has plagued the Game Commission for almost a century. Could perspective be the cure?

The average number of deer-vehicle collisions per day in Pennsylvania is 275. The harvest in 1907 was 230 deer. Hunters in Pennsylvania have been harvesting more than 300,000 deer for more than 20 years. That's more than six million deer harvested in a quarter of a century. Recall that there were only 300,000 living deer in the entire country slightly more than a hundred years ago.

Deer have not been an endangered species in this state since 1900. But that's when amnesia set in, and as George Santayana said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Truer words were never spoken.

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