



Whitetail Predation

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Bueller . . . Bueller

THERE IS NO DENYING that predator is a sexy word. The nuts and bolts of predator-prey relationships, not so much. I sat down with my general ecology book — *The Economy of Nature*. As I skimmed through pages that have not seen the light of day for more than a decade, to provide some background and perspective as we get started on our “circle of life” journey, the irony of the title did not escape me. The monotone voice of an Economics teacher rang in my ears — “anyone? Anyone?” Ferris Bueller is not the only one who’ll need a day off after this.

Predators and prey have an uneasy but necessary relationship with one another. Predators cannot exist without prey and prey may not exist without predators. What? Predators with extreme efficiency would eat their prey to extinction. Bad for prey, even worse for predators. Because without prey, predators seal their own fate of extinction. But prey can certainly exist without the hungry cloud of predation, right? Well, not necessarily. Predation increases diversity by reducing competition between prey species. See what I mean. Anyone? Anyone?

Mother Nature is harsh but she’s not stupid. Prey species do not co-exist blissfully with one another, holding hands and singing Kumbaya. Without predator removals, some prey species would happily squeeze out their competitive resource rivals.

So how does Mother Nature prevent an economic catastrophe and create stability in the market for both predator and prey? She diversifies: refuge acquisitions for prey, lower returns on predator efficiency, and increased investments through alternative prey sources. Implementation of this strategy is the resulting predator-prey relationship. Predators and prey do not evolve in a vacuum. Remember, one can’t exist without the other — like the Ying to the Yang or Jeckel to Hyde. This is an unbreakable bond driving prey to better ways of escape and avoidance and predators to vary hunting techniques — two populations interacting and responding to one another’s evolutionary changes for survival. In science, it’s called coevolution and basically guarantees that neither predator nor prey will get the upper hand for more than a short period of time — a dynamic equilibrium ensuring the survival of both.

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Staying awake for Mother Nature's economics lecture is one thing, but understanding it is another. It is complex. Oversimplifying predation is akin to taking the day off, which is the last thing any of us should do.