

Whitetail

Predation



The Ultimate Predator

PEOPLE, we have the power to level mountains, cause large-scale ecosystem changes, eliminate entire species from the planet and produce reality TV. Does it really come as any surprise to you that we are the number one factor causing a deer's demise? All the coyotes, bears, bobcats, fishers, foxes and dogs in Pennsylvania don't hold a candle to the wave of mortality known as hunting. If you are a deer in Pennsylvania, it's the two-legged predator for which you had better watch out. For more than two decades, Pennsylvania hunters have been harvesting more than 300,000 deer annually. If I were a deer, I'd rather take my chances with a coyote. There's a better chance of outrunning one of them than a bullet.

Wait one cotton-picking minute—you don't see Joe Hunter taking those cute, speckled, defenseless babies in June or July, while the rest of those four-legged predators are on the prowl. But don't think for one minute that people do not cause any fawn mortality prior to our established hunting seasons. In the largest fawn study conducted in North America, right here in Pennsylvania, people (in one way, shape or form) were responsible for 17 percent of all fawn mortalities. While 'natural' predators do account for a higher percentage of fawn mortality, there is no denying that cars, fences, tractors, even abandoned wells, are all effective human-related predators.

Still doubt our ultimate predator status in the deer world? Let's look at adult deer. Over the last decade or so, thousands of adult deer have been collared, tagged and tracked across Pennsylvania. For those animals that met their end while we were keeping tabs, 71 percent did so during the hunting season. Another 14 percent had some other unfortunate human-related encounter. Adult deer that had an unfortunate encounter with a predator—one percent. Eighty-five percent of adult deer mortality is at the hands of people. Do you still have doubts about the number one predator of deer in Pennsylvania?

In all the cascading consequences of our actions (including reality TV), the fact that more than 85 percent of deer expire as a result of human-related activities is not that big of a deal. However, it gives us perspective.

Maybe coyotes, bears, bobcats, fishers and foxes aren't so bad. After all, they're just trying to make a living. 🐾



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