

## Bobcats & Coyotes & Bears, OROTHY isn't the only one afraid cats killed Oh My!

DOROTHY isn't the only one afraid of getting eaten by a bear. For a prey species, danger could be lurking around every corner. Deer have been meals for mountain lions, wolves, coyotes, bears, lynx, bobcats, eagles and even alligators. Through it all, deer have persevered in this evolutionary cat-and-mouse game. In Pennsylvania today, the deer's list of enemies is shorter than it once was, but still includes bobcats, coyotes, black bears, and, of course, humans!

Historically, mountain lions, wolves and people were the main predators of white-tailed deer. Mountain lions are solitary predators that stalk their prey. In western states, 60 to 80 percent of their diet is deer. Wolves chase their prey in packs and travel extensively to find their quarry. The staple of their diet throughout their North American range is white-tailed deer. An adult wolf can consume 20 or more deer annually, half of which may be fawns. A recent Pennsylvania study investigating fawn survival showed 46 percent of mortalities were the result of a

predator — 1/3 from coyotes, 1/3 from black bears, and 1/3 unknown. Bobcats killed only a few fawns. Penn-

sylvania research has documented only three coyote kills, one black bear kill, and one bobcat kill out of hundreds of adult deer collared.

Deer are not completely defenseless against attacks. Evolving with mountain lions and wolves has given them some pointers. Deer are most vulnerable at birth. In a strategy called *predator* swamping most fawns are born in a 2-week period, swamping the market with more fawns than predators can eat. And when fawns remain motionless (another survival strategy), their speckled coat and lack of odor help them escape detection. As fawns age, they get stronger. In three days, a fawn can outrun a human; in three weeks, a coyote; and in six weeks, a bobcat. When they reach adulthood, alertness and speed are a deer's greatest defenses. Hearing, sight, and smell have become fine-tuned instruments, multiplied by 5, 10 or 20 herd members, a predator's meal becomes a tall order.

While bobcats, coyotes and bears are a fact of life for every deer, they have played the game before and victory is experienced with every escape.



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