

To my knowledge, Dr. Bruce Wilkin of Ely, Nevada was the first person to attempt calling attention to game predation problems in our state.

Frustrated at our Wildlife Department's reluctance to even talk of predation, Dr. Wilkin compiled the following information back in 1981.

B. Wilkin

A SECOND OPINION ON MANAGEMENT OF OUR WILDLIFE

Whatever happened to Nevada's deer herds? That is a question which thousands of our residents have asked themselves and have asked our Department of Wildlife in recent years. Few of us, if any, have received satisfactory answers. We have heard all kinds of reasons or excuses for the demise of our deer herds such as overgrazing by livestock, deer dying off from eating crested wheat grass, Pinion-Juniper encroachment upon browse habitat, and that the damned poachers in Lincoln County are killing off all of the deer, but none of these explanations really ring true to those of us who have lived most of our lives in Nevada.

Why has the average annual harvest in Nevada dropped from more than 24,000 deer per year for the 15 years from 1951 through 1965 to an average of just 12,000 per year for the past 15 years? From a record high harvest of nearly 35,000 deer in 1955 we dropped to a dismally low harvest of only 4,925 deer in 1975. WHY?

We all realize that there are complex factors affecting wildlife numbers, and many of these such as "hard winters" cannot be controlled by man. But what about the things which we can control? Those of us who can recall the hunting during the good years remember that we harvested a lot of does or antlerless deer during that time, and we all have a tendency to want to place the blame for our present shortage of deer on that factor. This may have played some part in our past decline, but after collecting and analyzing all of the harvest data from the past 30 years, I no longer feel that this was the major factor. We maintained an antlerless harvest of 40 to 50 per cent from 1955 through 1965 with no obvious decline in the total deer herds or harvest. If antlerless harvest was responsible for the declining total numbers of deer in our state, then the decline should have started immediately after the record harvest in 1955, but this was not the case. The severely cold winters preceding the low harvest in 1975 may have contributed to that particular sharp decline. But since that time we have had several mild winters, we have eliminated the antlerless harvest, and we have severely restricted the hunting pressure and harvest with the establishment of the restrictive quota system and drawing for tags in 1976. The present system has eliminated more than half of the deer hunters who were hunting in Nevada in previous years. Yet in spite of these efforts by our Department of Wildlife and the recent mild winters, we have not seen a significant increase in our deer herds. In fact, Area 23 in Lincoln County where I grew up, has continued to decline until the deer numbers there are now at there lowest level in 35 years.

Why did we have the tremendous increase in our deer numbers following 1950 and the sudden decline after 1965? As far as I know, our Department of Wildlife has never offered a satisfactory explanation: However, from my research of this problem during the past several months, I have come across one important factor which corresponds exactly with the growth and decline of our deer herds, and that is PREDATOR CONTROL! For some reason our Department of Wildlife has chosen to overlook or ignore this important factor. But once you learn of the starting and ending dates for effective predator control in Nevada and plot these on the deer harvest graph, it becomes obvious that there is a very strong positive correlation between our deer population and predator control.

One of the most serious predators on deer in Nevada is the mountain lion. Wildlife biologists have calculated from their studies and observations that a lion on the average will kill a deer every 7 to 10 days. This would indicate from our Department of Wildlife's very conservative estimate of nearly 600 lions in Nevada last year that the deer harvest by lions is at least 30,000 per year. In addition to this, the coyotes and bobcats are killing another 50,000 to 60,000 deer per year, so now we find ourselves in a situation in which the predators are taking 8 to 9 times as many deer each year in Nevada as the hunters are allowed to harvest.

Did our Department of Wildlife or the State Board of Wildlife Commissioners ever consult you and me about protecting the predators or eliminating effective predator control at the cost of losing half of our mule deer harvest each year? I don't believe they ever explained it to us in those terms, did they? I feel that it is time that we took a hard look at our past and present wildlife management policies and decide whether or not we are pleased with the outlook for our future and for our children's future. I am not at all pleased with the things which I have learned, and I am confident that the vast majority of our sportsmen will feel the same way when they learn these facts. I would appreciate hearing from other concerned sportsmen who would like to share their views.



BRUCE W. WILKIN, M.D., Member
White Pine County Game Management Board

MULE DEER HARVEST IN NEVADA 1948-1980

○ Harvest calculated from questionnaires
 ● Harvest calculated from tag returns

Compiled by Bruce Wilkin, M.D.
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