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Is killing deer really a necessity?

Hunting deer in urban and suburban areas is not the necessity it is often made out to be (“Deer hunts in Montgomery parks are necessary,” Nov. 30). Those who advocate population reduction may be firm in their position, but the ecology of urban deer should be better understood before the management trigger is pulled.

Lyme disease is a case in point. A wide variety of other mammals and even some birds are also important hosts for ticks, and the role of the diminutive white-footed mouse may actually turn out to be the key to controlling tick populations. Killing deer to control this disease would require reducing their numbers drastically, which in the short term could be a disaster, as ticks denied a deer host seek another big mammal — like us — as an alternative.

Managed hunts have not resolved the conflicts that decision makers set out to fix. There is a shocking lack of good scientific information that can withstand peer-review scrutiny, document efficacy, or point to where management programs are provably successful, not just in Montgomery County, but pretty much everywhere. Then there are some hard questions to ask about the ethics of hunting deer who have grown from fawn to adult seeing people every day — jogging, biking, hiking — and consider the presence of humans to be completely nonthreatening. The use of trained sharpshooters costs communities money at a time when budgets are being slashed for essential services. Bearing the costs of such programs would impose another type of moral examination, as communities take a hard and critical look at whether the “problems” with deer are really so important that they warrant the investment culling would require.

As the controversies that continually swirl around deer management refuse to go away, it is time to re-examine the process from front to back, and determine whether killing deer as a form of conflict resolution is a “necessity” or something else.

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