

The Final Solution for Deer

By William Nicoson

*“Why, let the stricken deer go weep...
For some must watch while some must sleep...”*
Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*

If you don’t watch out for deer while driving these days, you may sleep sooner than you think. In fact, a deer may help you dream eternally, as Hamlet feared, whether you’re watching or not.

A year ago my brother-in-law visited Reston in his shiny, upscale new car. As the two of us were riding at dusk on Wiehle Avenue, a deer dashed across the lane of on-coming traffic, slammed into the driver’s side of the car and disappeared limping into underbrush. The car didn’t limp but needed body-work. Had the deer dashed a bit faster, we would have hit him head-on with unpredictable consequences to life and limb not only for us but for passengers in nearby cars as well.

I remembered then that a school librarian had recently died when her car struck a deer head-on in McLean.

Two weeks ago at midnight my wife and I were driving back to Reston from D.C. at a nice clip. We were in the left lane some 3 thousand yards short of the Route 267 toll booths when our headlights revealed a deer on our left poised to dash across the highway. In the dark, the deer could be seen only seconds before we came abreast. We were traveling at a speed which left no room for maneuver to avoid collision had the deer leapt in front of us. As we flashed by, the deer still poised in darkness, sparing us calamity, was a vision never to be forgotten.

As Fairfax County’s deer population has grown in recent years, so have deer-related accidents on roads. In 1997, 186 auto accidents in the County were reported to involve deer, up from 133 two years earlier. Wildlife experts estimate that more than 46,000 deer now inhabit county woodlands, some 21,000 more than last year.

Last year, reacting to deer danger on the roads, the County sponsored deer hunts in two of its parks. Some sixty animals were liquidated, fewer than officials had hoped. This year a pilot program has been proposed to create a team of trained marksmen to circulate by trucks at night through three County parks targeting deer with high-powered rifles equipped with silencers. The parks proposed are Bull Run Regional, Riverbend and Huntley Meadows. A similar plan was voted down by the Board of Supervisors last year in the face of strong criticism from animal rights activists. On November 16, the Supervisors will consider the issue again.

A report has been submitted to the Board by a wildlife biologist who points out that the burgeoning deer herd in the County is destroying the habitat and food supply of other wildlife in

addition to creating risks for road traffic and garden shrubs and flowers.

Lynchburg has successfully followed an aggressive program designed to shrink deer herds by employing marksmen to track and liquidate deer, not just in parks, but throughout the community based on citizen complaints. Other jurisdictions have adopted plans similar to the pilot program under consideration in Fairfax County, using sharpshooters on truck-mounted platforms to pursue deer in parks. But the size of the Fairfax County herd has created doubt among some officials that employing midnight marksmen is a sufficiently deadly solution.

One neighbor told me recently that a brace of deer were observed in my front yard nuzzling freshly-planted azaleas. The next day a delivery truck negotiating the curved driveway crushed the azaleas altogether.

We've got too many deer and too many vehicles. While we slaughter deer, shouldn't we also consider shrinking the herd of vehicles? Anyone for mass transit?

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