

September 2, 2014 Deer / Tick Borne Illness Committee Meeting Animal Control Perspective from ACO Richard A. Watt

Introduction

I have been a Bethlehem Animal Control Officer for over twenty years.

I was introduced to the outdoors in 1953 with camping and fishing. The next year I was allowed to tag along hunting and in 1959 I started trapping and have enjoy it all ever since.

I have been on and around farms since I was 4 years old. I bought my own small farm in 1997 and have raised many different animals as well as vegetables.

I have been licensed as a Nuisance Wildlife Control Contractor for many years.

After a 22 year stint as a communications engineer with the phone company and going through management downsizing I became an Animal Control Officer on January 1, 1994 and have been with BPD ever since.

As an Animal Control Officer I have worked with many different law enforcement agencies as well as NYSDEC, NYSDOH, ACDOH, NYSA&M, CDC and many others. A large network has been developed for communication. I have taught and helped many other DCOs and ACOs as well as learned from them.

Deer

As an ACO I am directly involved with the town's deer population and have seen how it affects residents, farmers & landscapers. It does add to the workload of the Town, County and State agencies that are responsible for the roads and highways in Bethlehem. It adds to the workload of police agencies. As a side note because Animal Control enforces running at large laws ACO's have a lot to do with deer population in town. When dogs ran at large deer did not feel comfortable enough to live here.

It is not legal to feed deer near roads and highways yet some people do. As late as Tuesday August 26, I had to break hard about 12 noon to avoid hitting a fawn that was running from a location where a woman has been advised by DEC to cease feeding the deer.

I have observed deer movement patterns and how they change with new construction. There is also a browse line in all the little woodlots in town where everything deer can eat is missing as high as they can reach. As dark approaches the deer arrive in people's yards and crop fields to find food.

It seems that landscapers love to plant things that deer like as it is good for repeat business.

Many people seem to drive with tunnel vision and don't notice deer on the side of the roads or approaching their driving path. Some people even honk at the animals as if the animal will understand. That and driving too fast causes many Car / Deer accidents. During the rut I have responded to as many as 4 in one evening.

Remember that the Car / Deer accident charts you were given only represent accidents that were reported to BPD! There are many more deer left dead on the roads and more stagger away injured. A friend of mine's mother was killed on Delaware Avenue when a buck went through the windshield in the daytime. I can't imagine what the cost in damage for all these accidents is not to mention human and animal suffering.

Many residents have asked me "What is the Town going to do about the deer?" I have had to tell them that NYSDEC is responsible for the deer not the Town. I do however offer any knowledge I have of deterrents.

Sport hunting is and has been the most cost effective way to control deer populations. Some residents are hunters, some welcome hunters while others see hunting as a cruel sport and reject any request to hunt their property. People are designed as hunter / gatherers and hunting generates revenue and feeds many people. Ethical hunters harvesting an animal is a much more humane death than any other found in nature and certainly better than being run over by a vehicle!

Tick Borne Illness

I introduced BPD to Lyme disease in a report after watching it creep northward from Connecticut carried by the deer ticks that we previously never saw in this area. I have known many residents and their animals who have suffered the effects since it arrived. I have watched as new ticks and diseases have also arrived in town. I suspect that they got a jump northward when dogs from the south were imported for sale or rescue starting with Hurricane Katrina.

The TOB has lost both sick time and had retirement because of Lyme disease.

Bethlehem Animal Control has been one of the largest contributors of specimens to the NYSDEC Wildlife Pathology Unit located at Five Rivers. These specimens are used for disease monitoring in the wildlife, tick borne illnesses included. I have observed ticks on most of the different mammal species I have submitted.

Most dogs that I have picked up running at large (excluding in very cold weather) also have ticks.

Free roaming cats also suffer from tick infestation as well as all the other hazards they face when they are where they shouldn't be.

If I have to go into taller vegetation I spray my pant legs and boots with DEET. I still many times find ticks when I check.

Thank you all for letting me contribute to this committee I have learned a great deal from these meetings and been amazed at the knowledge that has been shared here.

QUESTIONS?