Connecting to Deer

By Alex Matz

From a standstill, deer can jump an 8-foot fence. That’s twice their height. Moreover, deer can walk within 30 minutes of being born. For perspective, it takes humans nine to eighteen months until they can walk.

But deer never get the credit they deserve. Whenever I hear about these gifted athletes, it’s always in the context of a car crash, plundered garden, or unwelcomed lawn ornament. In other words, people unfairly, and repeatedly, focus on the negative attributes of deer.

Perhaps, however, the problem resides in the fact that humans have encroached on the deer’s habitat, and not vice versa. Perhaps, humans are to blame for the constant presence of these extraordinary creatures. That would be an unpopular opinion, but one worth considering.

In my small rural community of Coatesville Pennsylvania, located about 40 minutes from sprawling Philadelphia, rolling pastures dominate the landscape. On top of the hill, dense woods afford a refuge for fauna during the blistering winters and scorching summers. For the white-tailed deer population, who graze on a surplus of wine berries, thin strands of ryegrass provide molded bedding akin to a Tempur-Pedic mattress. Yet, in the utopia that Coatesville can become, nature constantly provides humbling symbols of its Darwinist origins. Life is never far from death.

Turning over in my bed to a blast of sunlight, I felt the dopamine race to my brain. “Beautiful”, I murmured as I saw the first dry day of Spring.

 Peering out my window, a light breeze rocked the ryegrass back and forth like high school lovers at their final prom. The sun engulfed the earth with a warmth only matched by that of family. Flora and fauna spawned the rolling plains. Even the first strawberry had appeared.

As I drove to our local market for my lunch break, windows down listening to “Don’t Stop Me Now” by Queen, I was interrupted by a violent sight. The car in front of me swerved left, then right, then flung itself into the ditch on the side of the road. Shocked, I slammed on the breaks and went to inspect the scene.

The passenger of the car was fine; however, their car was not. It contained a broken windshield and dented front fender. Both of which were the result of its impact with a white-tailed buck.

“It came out of nowhere! Jumped the fence and slammed into me,” said the man. “It must have been going 50 miles per hour, god damnit”!

The man was frazzled, but I couldn’t stop thinking about what he had said. ‘It must have been going 50 miles an hour’. That can’t be true. As I looked at the lifeless creature, body sinking into the wild grass, eyes reflecting the now seemingly soft sunlight, my mind began to race.

I went home that night and conducted some research on white tailed deer.

It turns out they can reach a top speed of 35 miles per hour, while their relative, the Reindeer, can reach speeds up to 50 miles per hour. Also, each year bucks shed their antlers only to be regrown the following season. They even grow velvet on their antlers. As parents, white-tailed deer are extremely protective. They use their adapted brown coats to hide their young in tall grass. Moreover, while twins are rare, white tailed deer are very fertile. In fact, in some areas such as the Appalachian region, the white-tailed deer population are threatening rare local fauna. That said, one mustn’t look far to find other incidents where deer are the victims, and not the perpetrators.

In a Washington Post article published in 2013, Fairfax officer sharpshooters were instructed to take up arms against any deer spotted inside Cabin John Regional Park. The park, which sits on the edges of Potomac and Bethesda, is home to numerous native flora which many deer activists argue is the root of the problem. Activists blamed the emerging invasive flora, which the white-tailed deer do not like to consume, for driving deer into backyards.

 Across the aisle, proponents of the deer executions state that deer are disturbing natural populations of other flora and fauna in the region, as well as causing safety hazards for drivers.

While both arguments had validity, the latter could not withstand my experience at home. Lying so tenderly in his bed of grass, connected to the earth, I felt that executing deer was at odds with nature’s laws. My experience illuminated the delicate relationship between humans and wildlife, which stands at risk if we continue to operate under of condition of our own practicality.

Sources:

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