

Catalina battling deer population explosion

Options viewed as birth control fails and deer are everywhere

BY DAVID N. YOUNG

There is a bit of a tug-of-war going on between the city of Avalon, the Santa Catalina Island Conservancy and the California agency that regulates policies related to fish and wildlife as the deer population on the island continues to grow and is approaching a health emergency. Conservancy CEO Tony Budrovich made an impromptu appearance at the most recent Avalon City Council meeting where Interim City Manager Denise Radde struggled to explain the city's options regarding the deer population to inquiring council member Richard Hernandez.

Budrovich explained the deer population was nearing the point of being an unhealthy situation for the island. "The deer on this island are at a level we think is not sustainable," said Budrovich. The Conservancy CEO acknowledged that he and other officials from his organization are in discussions with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, who have been trying to control the deer population with birth control measures. It's not working, he said.

He briefly explained the "complicated process" of administering birth control to deer, saying the complexity makes deer birth control effective for parcels of 10 to 20 acres. The Conservancy manages 48,000 acres shared by the deer population. "We worked with a variety of experts," said Budrovich, who claims that the consensus is

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that Catalina Island can sustainably support "a population of about 500 deer." Currently, said Budrovich, experts estimate there are more than 2,300 on the island, creating a real problem.

"The other night I encountered 22 deer from the Casino to my home at Hamilton Cove," said Budrovich, which he said "is a record for me." That distance is less than a mile. From a health point of view, the free ranging deer roam into town to eat garbage and other "less desirable" staples. Moreover, Budrovich said the Conservancy tests the meat

of deer to determine their overall health. "The deer roaming on the island are very healthy," said Budrovich, while the deer that roam around the city of Avalon "are very unhealthy."

Moreover, Budrovich said so many deer are gobbling up a massive amount of beautiful wildflowers and other plants across the island. "There's a lot more munching going on than we think is healthy for the plants and animals of this island," he told the Council. Budrovich said Conservancy officials were excited about a "beautiful wildflower bloom" on the island, but about two months later, "we had very little to talk about. All the new sprouts had

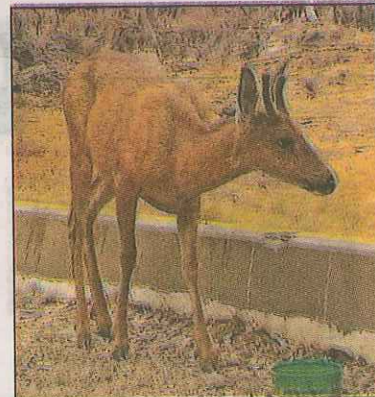
been picked off." by the deer.

There are three overall options, including hunting said Budrovich, yet state officials are currently "drawing a blank."

The Conservancy could build a "deer wall" to keep deer in the wild and out of the city, but that option would cost "millions and millions" of dollars, he said.

Budrovich told city officials that, currently, they do have responsibility for the deer that wander into the city but the Conservancy is mulling plans to assume the ownership

of the deer population in order to develop long term solutions. "There is no quick fix," he warned, adding that so many other more populous states and areas have a deer problem that federal or state funds would be difficult, if not impossible to obtain. The deer population is "out of control" on Catalina Island, he said. If the Conservancy opts for ownership of the deer population, Budrovich said the "deer population will become our problem" and "we will look for a reasonable long-term solution."



Deer in town. Photo by David N. Young