CUT DOWN ON DEER TO HALT LYME DISEASE

I've got Lyme disease. This makes me hopping mad at whoever's in charge of letting this "important public health concern" run wild when we know how to tame it.

Connecticut's Department of Public Health, source of the quote above, writes that we have the "highest number of cases relative to the population of any state," largely because of our "overabundant deer population."

Meanwhile, the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection writes that "deer population management must serve as the main tool in any long-term strategy to reduce human incidences of Lyme disease" because deer are "key to the reproductive success of the tick." Meanwhile, the Connecticut's Agricultural Experiment Station reports that that this summer will likely be a bad one for contracting the disease. Apparently, the thick snowfalls of last winter, though hard on us, enhanced the survival of adult deer ticks. This allows them to produce more of those itsy-bitsy nymphal ticks that transmit the bacterial spirochete to us.

Good luck in avoiding this management fiasco. I wasn't so lucky.

After turning in my grades in late May, I spent several weeks working out of state. I returned home to Mansfield just long enough to be bitten by a tick, probably while mowing my yard, which the deer treat as a private meadow. I then left for another two weeks on a working vacation in Maine. Within a day, I noticed a red spot at the sock line of my leg. For one week I watched it grow in diameter, swell up and redden into a low mound. Then it stabilized. Placing great faith in my body's naturally strong immune system, I did nothing. My wife grew concerned enough to subject my leg to a jury of family. The verdict was that I should see a doctor. Characteristically, I declined the advice.

On the day we returned to Connecticut, however, I started getting symptoms I remembered from a record-breaking case of Lyme disease 10 years ago. Chief among them was a dull and persistent pain caused by the clenching and swelling of my back muscles, which prevented adequate sleep. Not wanting to repeat that disaster, I relented and drove to a walk-in medical clinic where I was properly diagnosed and prescribed the antibiotics I had hoped to avoid.

On the way home, I saw a mangled, gas-bloated fawn on the side of the road near my neighborhood. Though my initial thought was sadness, my next was satisfaction. "One down, two to go," I counted down to myself, referencing the three cute fawns that boldly forage in my backyard in daylight with their mother. Within half an hour, however, I noticed that all three fawns were happily nibbling. Obviously, the road-kill fawn I'd seen was from some other mother who likewise experienced breeding success during what I assumed was a bad winter for both deer and ticks. How wrong I was, based on my local count.

Let's stop distracting ourselves with sentiment. There is neither beauty nor cruelty in nature. Rather, there are aspects of nature that strike us as beautiful, and aspects that strike us as cruel, such as an image of Bambi vs. that of an eight-legged creepy crawler.

Connecticut's high incidence of Lyme disease is not a case of ignorance, but of mistaken sentimentality. In a carefully controlled, eight-year study of Groton's Mumford Cove, the incidence of Lyme disease dropped a whopping 83 percent after a program of controlled hunting. With voter buy-in and agency cooperation, this proven success can happen in your town.
Allowing an overabundant deer population is immoral because it only leads to greater cruelty, such as deer so hungry they eat white pine and forage more widely, thereby crossing more highways in a state of high anxiety. More selfishly, the deer, the ticks and the spirochetes are aligned against us, thereby creating a tighter knot of medical, financial and legal issues that costs us money we don’t have.