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Letter: Cutting Deer Population Won't Help Reduce Ticks — Friends of Animals President

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Date : March 9, 2019

To the editor:

Kudos to Doug Tallamy, entymologist and author of *Bringing Nature Home*, for helping to change people's mindset across the country about the birds and the bees.

He is educating people about how insects like moths and caterpillars are indispensable when it comes to biodiversity in ecosystems and that the best thing we can do for wildlife and the environment is plant native flowering plants, trees and shrubs in our own backyard.

He brought his empowering and poignant message to the Darien Library Thursday evening and it was thrilling.

But Tallamy veered out of his lane of expertise and undermined deer when the topic of ticks and Lyme Disease came up, and that was disappointing. Tallamy seemed unaware of a study conducted at Penn State University showing that deer exclusion in smaller areas is likely to amplify ticks and produce tick-borne disease hotspots where rodents are ubiquitous.

He also didn't seem privy to research by the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies in New York. Senior scientists there found that white-footed mice are the most important hosts in producing infected ticks.

Eastern chipmunks and both short-tailed shrews and masked shrews also produce quite a few infected ticks. Pretty much all the other animals they've studied, including gray squirrels, red squirrels, flying squirrels, opossums, raccoons, skunks, deer, robins, veeries, wood thrush, and gray catbirds, are much less important in producing infected ticks.

In fact, these animals kill lots of ticks when they groom themselves, and the ticks that do survive and successfully feed on them do not get infected. So, these species largely play protective roles when it comes to human risk of Lyme disease.

Also nature ensures that the deer population is limited by available food, territory and winter weather conditions, which restrict both food and range, and natural mortality—thus, a natural balance. Hunting can actually cause the numbers to rise, according to biologists.

In large populations, deer conceive later in the season, and that results in late-born fawns with a reduced chance of surviving through the winter. So although hunting reduces the population in the immediate sense, it stimulates early reproduction and augments the chances for survival in the next generation.

In the future, we hope Tallamy will give the same respect to deer as he does to insects and pollinators, because they all help run the ecosystems our lives depend on.

Priscilla Feral

President

[Friends of Animals](#)