



Tales from a  
**Sisters  
Naturalist**  
by Jim Anderson

**Feeding can lead  
to deer deaths**

Come on, people! Please, *please* stop feeding those mule deer that are constant moochers in our backyards. Shout at them, throw rags at them, squirt them with the garden hose — do everything (legally) possible to convince them that living in town is NOT good for their health.

If the deer in town don't get hit by a semi going down the main drag they bunch up and spread AHD (Adenovirus Hemorrhagic Disease), and that is really a killer.

Kincaid Smeltzer, whom I frequently bump into at Bi-Mart, went hiking with some of his pals recently in the Alder Springs Trail country and found dead mule deer on and near the trail, and there were more in the area he could smell.

Smeltzer said, "They were found all along the trail from the start to end. Some deer

seemed more recent dead than others with only a couple with signs of predation, or what I could see.

"The ones that had not been eaten yet were curled up. As a result of seeing all these dead deer, I wanted to see if I could find out what happened. Hopefully, you can shed some light on this."

During a phone call to the Bend Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife office reporting Smeltzer's discovery, both Corey Heath and Randy Lewis sighed, and Randy said, "Yeah, those are probably more victims of AHD, Jim. We've been checking deer in the Metolius Unit and surrounding area, and AHD's hit them pretty hard."

And then he added, "I wish there were some way we could stop those kind-hearted people from feeding deer. Not only was AHD the cause of their deaths, but when we checked the stomachs of some of the dead deer we found undigested junk food, including alfalfa, heavy grains and cracked corn. When are people going to get it...? Mule deer CANNOT digest cracked corn!"

He went on to address how crowding deer, when feeding them grains and chicken food, not only kills them, but spreads AHD quicker, and keeps them in town, preventing the deer from going out to the wintering grounds

where healthy food is abundant, and also keeps them spread out and not so easily infected with AHD.

Here's what AHD is all about:

- Adenoviruses belong to a small group of viruses that can infect a variety of animals, both wild and domestic.

- Infected deer have symptoms that include rapid or open mouth breathing, foaming or drooling at the mouth, diarrhea (possibly bloody), weakness, ulcers and abscesses in the mouth and throat.

- Estimates from a California outbreak indicate mortality of infected fawns generally was very high, with lower adult mortality. During a 2002 Oregon outbreak, deer of all age and sex classes died in roughly the same proportions they occurred in the California population. Research is underway in Oregon to determine how many deer in the population were exposed to AHD but survived.

- Transmission is by direct contact between deer, contact with bodily fluids, and possibly airborne routes. The time between exposure to the virus and showing signs of illness or death is commonly less than one week. High-density deer populations could have a higher risk for the disease due to the ease of



PHOTO PROVIDED BY ODFW

**Another dead mule deer. Thanks in a large part to people who insist on feeding them food they can't digest and crowding that spreads disease.**

transmission.

*For this reason, ODFW encourages people to avoid providing feed or water stations for deer because it may help spread the disease if it is present in the population.*

- Monitoring, proper carcass disposal and not moving infected live deer are methods that can help minimize movement of the disease to new areas, but there is no cure.

- There are no known cases of humans getting sick from AHD. However, if a person lives or hunts in an infected area, it's a good idea to wear rubber gloves when handling carcasses. People who may be sick for any reason or who have a compromised immune system also should take special precautions around deer carcasses. There also are no known

health risks of eating meat from a deer infected with AHD, but experts recommend thoroughly cooking the meat from animals harvested in an area where the infection is present.

- If enough deer die to significantly reduce populations in a unit, hunter success may be low in that unit during the year of the die-off. If subsequent herd inventories indicate reduced populations, low fawn recruitment or low buck ratios, future tag numbers could be reduced until the herd recovers.

So there you have it Good People. AHD is nothing to fool around with.

Please urge the Oregon Legislature to get busy and pass a law making it illegal for anyone to feed mule deer and elk.

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