

## Fall 2015/ Winter 2016 Field Report

**SUMMARY:** The first year of field operations started on December 1<sup>st</sup> and finished on December 7<sup>th</sup> with 41 does sterilized and tagged and 3 incidental male fawns tagged and released, for a total of 44 captures.

A post-operations population survey, based on review of three weeks of field camera data, revealed the presence of almost twice as many deer as estimated by the Cincinnati Parks in its 2015 aerial infrared count. Based on the new population survey, Dr. Anthony DeNicola of White Buffalo Inc. believes roughly 86% of the adult does were sterilized in the first round, and that this should be enough to stop herd growth and may begin reductions. Next year's effort will focus on female fawns, missed does, and new immigrants and hopefully will continue to stabilize the population and initiate significant annual reduction.

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**White Buffalo, Inc.** As planned, all field operations were directed and managed by the team from White Buffalo Inc. consisting of Dr. Anthony (Tony) DeNicola, his wife and business partner, Vickie, their partner of 18 years, Ryan Rodts, and the lead veterinarian from Columbus, Randy Junge.

The team converged in Cincinnati on December 1<sup>st</sup> and began immediately checking pre-established bait stations and setting up the surgical facility. Dr. DeNicola held an orientation session that evening for all transport volunteers, attended by a representative from the Cincinnati Police, and work officially got underway around 8:00 PM.

**Volunteers.** Staff from The Humane Society of the United States and more than thirty local volunteers aided in the launch and execution of this project's first field season. They included UC graduate and undergraduate students from Environmental Studies, Biology, Social Work and Air Force ROTC; a Walnut Hills High School student; local veterinarians and vet techs; bow hunters from the Parks' culling program; animal welfare activists; and others. More than a dozen Clifton residents volunteered their property for bait stations and release sites, and one hosted the field surgical center for the entire week.

Volunteers worked from late afternoon to early morning for six days carrying tranquilized deer to and from the surgical site, monitoring release sites, and assisting the veterinary staff.

Operations were observed by representatives of the Cincinnati Parks and the Ohio Division of Wildlife.

**Our Deer.** Wildlife biologists found most of our adult does to be 2½ to 3½ years old (based on dental exams). The oldest was 6½. Dr. DeNicola thinks the soft soil in this environment could reduce average tooth wear and our deer could be a year or two older than the teeth suggest.

They found no ticks or indications of contagious disease, but did find evidence of old injuries and illness in some animals, a reminder that these are wild animals living dangerous lives.

**Gains and Losses.** Based on the Park Board's aerial infrared surveys, the total herd population in the study area was estimated to be around 60-65 deer, about 40 of which were expected to be female. We therefore aimed to sterilize 40 does this year (and exceeded that target by sterilizing 41 does). White Buffalo's field observations indicate that in fact the total deer population likely far exceeds the Park Board's estimates, and may top 100 deer. Field cameras have been placed at strategic bait sites and will be monitored for three weeks; the data will be analyzed to determine more precisely the number of deer in the area.

White Buffalo, Inc. estimated we needed to sterilize 90% of reproductive age does to stop herd growth and approximately 95% to achieve reductions of 10% to 20% per year through attrition. Based on preliminary field observations, Dr. DeNicola believes that the 41 does sterilized represent about 90% of adult does. With the herd size stabilized, the goal for next year is to sterilize the remainder of the adult females, female fawns (who will be of reproductive age by next year) and new immigrant does who might enter the study area. At that point, population reductions of 10% to 20% per year will be possible.

We are sad to report that two of the 44 deer captured died during the release process. Preliminary examinations indicate the deaths resulted from capture-related complications and not the surgery, and in one case there were indications of pre-existing illness. Both were taken to Columbus for necropsies to try to determine the exact cause of death. While we accept that there are risks inherent in capturing wild animals, we feel these losses deeply and personally. We take some consolation in knowing the rest of the Clifton herd will live out their lives free from the threat of annual culling.

We should note that the sterilized does are adults and that on average 10-20% of them are expected to die annually, along with the rest of the herd, in the normal course of time and events. Their tags contain contact information so their deaths can be reported to White Buffalo and ultimately to the ODNR and us.

**Thanks.** The CliftonDeer.org team is immensely grateful for the help of so many who contributed so much to the first year of this project.