

Fall 2018/Winter 2019 Field Report

This year's capture and surgery operations took place over two long weekends—the evening of August 24th through the early morning hours of August 28th, 2018, and the evening of January 24th through the early morning hours of January 28th, 2019. Plans to spread operations over three to four weekends through the Fall yielded again to nature—another large acorn mast that weakened bait leverage and required a delay till late January.

Over the two weekends, 11 new does were sterilized and tagged, bringing the total of deer sterilized since the program began to 70. Additionally, two does in August were retreated after re-growing ovaries removed in the first year of operations (see discussion of Ovarian Remnant Syndrome in our [Year 3 Field Field Operations Report](#)), and one button buck was given yellow tags and released after being mistaken for a doe and darted.

Our annual field camera survey, conducted over 21 days in late January/early February 2019, showed an overall deer population reduction of ~25% since the program began in December 2015, and that ~94% of the adult does in our herd have now been sterilized.

All surgeries this season were performed at the UCAN Nonprofit Spay & Neuter Clinic, a five minute drive from the study area. UCAN's state of the art surgical facility and its mission to reduce overabundant animal populations non-lethally made this a logical and productive partnership. UCAN's medical director, in addition to participating herself, was instrumental in recruiting two highly experienced spay-neuter veterinary surgeons and a registered vet tech to Clifton Deer's surgery training program. UCAN's hospitality and support for our volunteers, out-of-town vets, and capture teams was extraordinary; to say we are grateful is an understatement.

One of our research objectives is to determine if local volunteers can learn the specialized capture and surgical functions required to maintain a sterilization program long enough to reduce the deer population to eco-sustainable levels without depending on expensive out-of-town experts. To that end, Clifton Deer applied for and received training grants in 2017 from The Kenneth A. Scott Charitable Trust, a KeyBank Trust, and The Botstiber Institute for Wildlife Fertility Control. These grants have been used to send a local man to darting schools and to work under White Buffalo's tutelage at other White Buffalo sites. It will take significant experience to learn the patterns of wary does in the wild, but our new darter is determined and, to date, has successfully darted four deer in Cincinnati and other sites.

Equally important, local veterinarians who volunteered this year gained experience in transferring their spay surgery skills with dogs and cats to deer. Surgical training will likely continue through the life of the current ODNR permit and the contract with White Buffalo—two more seasons of field operations.

As always, thanks from the CliftonDeer.org leadership team go out to the many volunteers without whom this project would not be possible, including: the veterinarians and surgical support volunteers, especially, this year, the staff and volunteers from UCAN, who spent long

nights waiting for deer to be darted; the Transport Teams who must quickly and carefully carry heavy animals on stretchers from deep, honeysuckle infested ravines where they run after darting to fall asleep, and then back after surgery to safe release sites; the Release Teams who spend hours waiting in silence in the cold night air for does to wake up and return safely to their friends and family; the faithful volunteers who walk the hilly streets of Clifton distributing flyers each year to every home in the study area advising of the dates and conditions of coming field operations; the volunteers who spend weeks before and after operations setting up blinds and putting out bait at exact times of the day and night to train the deer to show up for their surgical appointments; the homeowners who offer their yards for darting sites, release sites, and field camera population surveys; and the neighbors who provide information about the herd's health and movements in reports to our website.

Last but certainly not least, we are grateful beyond words to our loyal donors and grantors whose funding pays for the neighborhood informational flyers we distribute before each field operation, the field cameras we use to conduct our population surveys after each field operation, and everything in between.