

Is Mother Nature

HUMANE?



When it comes to wildlife, many people feel that if we let nature take its course that all wildlife problems will be solved. This is true to an extent as Mother Nature will stop overpopulations of any animal from occurring.

However, just how is this done if nature takes its course and man does not interfere? Any animal, take foxes or raccoons for instance, is able to reproduce at a rate that the population doubles yearly; two, then four, then eight, etc.

Soon there comes a time that there are so many animals that there is not enough food to go around, or

Mother Nature waits until the animal population is out of hand.

enough area in which to live. Some animals must therefore go. The way Mother Nature limits the number of any species is through disease, internal strife between the animals, or starvation.

Many of the diseases, such as rabies, or leptospirosis, are directly communicable to humans, or other diseases such as mange or distemper are directly communicable to domestic livestock or cats and dogs.



When fur-bearing and predator animals are not controlled by trappers, the result is overpopulation, followed by malnutrition, disease, and eventually total obliteration of the species.

These diseases are always present in the animal populations but only become prevalent or in epidemic proportions when the population of animals reaches a high level.

It is a fact that if there is a high population, then disease spreads much faster than when animal populations are low or stable.

The only problem with Mother Nature's method of population control is that she waits until the population is way out of hand before she takes over, and not before the population reaches a high level.

Soon many animals become sick and die until the population is very low and disease no longer spreads easily. Then, gradually, over several years, the population doubles yearly until that same overpopulation occurs again. It is the "Boom and Bust" theory.

Let's take a closer look at some of Mother Nature's population limiting diseases.

Distemper

This disease is caused by a virus. It is extremely contagious to dogs and cats and is carried by foxes, raccoons, skunks, mink, opossums, bobcats, etc.

There are two kinds of distemper virus, one infecting cats only and the other infecting dogs only. The wild canines (fox and coyote) carry only the dis-

temper virus that infects dogs. The wild felines such as bobcats carry only the distemper virus that infects cats.

However, raccoons, skunks and mink are susceptible to and carry both the feline and canine distemper virus.

The canine distemper virus affects the host animal's nervous system, usually resulting in convul-

Distemper is a long and drawn out cruel way to die.

sions, frothing at the mouth, and death over a period of several weeks.

The feline distemper virus affects the bone marrow where red and white blood cells are produced and also the lining of the digestive system.

Just as with mange, the infected animals usually contract secondary bacterial infections of several types and their eyes ooze pus and they often die of secondary bacterial infections such as pneumonia.

This disease is almost 100 percent fatal in both wild animals and dogs and cats. Distemper, just like mange, is a long and drawn out cruel way to die, and is only prevalent when wild animal populations reach high levels.



In this picture you see a raccoon infected with canine distemper. You can see by looking at this raccoon what a terrible disease this is.

Mange

This disease is caused by a microscopic mite that burrows tunnels through the host animal's skin. The mite is spread from one animal to the next through direct contact or one animal laying in the same burrow or den that an infected animal has used.

However, the mange mite lives only a few days if not feeding on a host animal. It is easy to see how this

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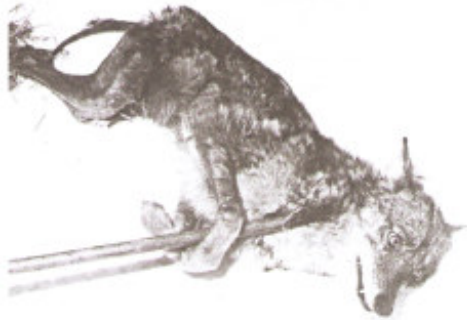
disease could spread through a whole litter or to all the animals using one den.

This disease is also extremely contagious to dogs and cats. Depending on the type of mite this disease can be carried by foxes, coyotes, bobcats, etc.

Humans handling animals infected with mange will break out with red itching welts, each welt being a place where a single mite has burrowed in.

Fortunately, mange mites are very host specific, so the disease carried by animals is self limiting in humans. Not so for the infected wild animals or domestic pets. Without treatment the disease is 100 percent fatal in animals.

The mites multiply until there are millions burrowing and digging in the host animal. Soon the animal begins chewing on itself and self mutilating its body. Open sores develop and become infected. The skin thickens and oozes pus.



This photo shows a coyote with Sarcoptic Mange.

In six to twelve weeks time, the animal will die from bacterial infections or starvation. If this death was quick and humane it would not be so bad, but this is one of the most painful, cruel and devastating diseases known in the animal world.

Yes, Mother Nature, if left alone, can correct over-population.



You see in each picture a healthy red fox and one infected with mange. The healthy fox was caught in a foot hold trap and humanely killed. If you were a red fox, which way would you want to die?

Rabies

This disease is also caused by a virus and is carried primarily by foxes and skunks; however raccoons, opossums, mink and bobcats are often infected.

This disease is virtually 100 percent fatal, with only one case on record of a human ever surviving. This disease is spread by contact with saliva of the infected animal and can be contacted by all species of animals, domestic and wild, including people.

An animal in the last stages of rabies often will froth at the mouth, due to paralyzed nerves in the

You cannot tell by an animal's looks if it has rabies or not.

throat preventing swallowing. Death finally comes when the diaphragm becomes paralyzed and the animal or human suffocates.

Infected animals in the terminal stage of rabies may have either "furious" or "dumb" rabies. In the "furious" stage the animal acts crazy and may attack anything from a tree to an elephant without being provoked. In the "dumb" stage the animal may act tame and be able to be handled.



This is a picture of a rabid fox's head. The fox, in the "furious" stage has attacked a porcupine, something only a rabid fox would do.

Often wild and elusive animals such as foxes or coyotes will walk right into backyards or groups of people and appear totally unafraid.

You see, you cannot tell by an animal's looks if it has rabies or not. Rabies is one of the most dread diseases of man.

Disease and Population Control

There are many other diseases such as tularemia, leptospirosis, brucellosis (undulant fever), rocky mountain spotted fever and hundreds more that wild animals carry and that can be contracted by man or his domestic animals. You all see why it is important not to let Mother Nature take her course.

One of the best ways to control and prevent disease outbreaks is through legitimate and controlled trapping of animals with foothold traps.

You notice we said prevent disease. This means purposely trapping and removing healthy animals so that the wild animal populations are kept at reasonable levels to prevent the spread of disease. Control-

The foothold trap is by far the superior method to control animal population

ling an outbreak of disease once started would include trapping both healthy and sick animals.

However, the trapping of healthy animals to keep the population low is far better than waiting for an outbreak to occur before trapping starts.

Yes, there are other methods to control animal populations, such as poisons, but poison is too non-selective and often too many animals are killed.

The foothold trap is by far the superior method as unwanted animals may be released uninjured.

Our fish and game departments set the trapping seasons each year so that only the overpopulation, or surplus animals are trapped. If populations are too high the season is lengthened so that more animals are trapped, or if the population is too low then the trapping season is shortened. The population levels are measured by trained wildlife biologists so that no mistakes are made.

Presently various groups have advocated the outlawing of trapping because they say it is cruel. Make up your own mind; should we let Mother Nature take her course or use the knowledge of the trained wildlife biologist to maintain healthy wildlife and protect people and pets through controlled trapping of wildlife when overpopulated.

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