

LAB _____, NATURAL CONTROLS OF POPULATIONS

The size of populations in a community are regulated in many ways. Some of the controls acting on populations are:

- the amount of food and water available to feed the population
- the amount of nesting sites available to support raising young
- the size of the predator population
- the amount of disease and parasites infecting the population

Because of these limitations a certain area can only support a certain size population of each type of organism. The population size of each creature that the environment can support is called the **carrying capacity** of that community. This limit represents how many of a certain species that can survive in that area.

In this lab we will study two real life examples of populations, their natural controls, and the carrying capacity of their community.

The Kaibab Deer

In the early 1900s, the Kaibab plateau, north of the Grand Canyon in Arizona, supported a population of about 4000 deer on over 700,000 acres. Predators, such as coyotes, wolves, and pumas, helped to keep the deer population in check. It was estimated at the time that the plateau had a carrying capacity of about 30,000 deer, so that there seemed to be plenty of food for the population that existed.

Ranchers who moved into the area lost many sheep and cattle to the predators. Then on November 28th, 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt created the Grand Canyon National Game Preserve to protect the "finest deer herd in America." In an effort to save livestock and increase the deer population for tourists, the Forest Service tried to exterminate the predators of the deer. Between 1907 and 1923, 816 mountain lions, 30 wolves, 7388 coyotes and more than 500 bobcats were killed.

With the successful removal of many of the predators, the deer herd increased dramatically. But signs that the deer population was out of control began to appear as early as 1920 and the range (the deer habitat) was beginning to deteriorate rapidly. The food supply was being overgrazed by the high population of deer. Trees and grass were being damaged to the point they couldn't recover for next year's growing season. Soon there wasn't enough food to feed the growing population. By 1923, the deer were reported to be on the verge of starvation and the range conditions were described as "deplorable."

The Kaibab Deer Investigating Committee recommended that the number of deer be cut in half as quickly as possible. Hunting was allowed, and during the fall of 1924, 675 deer were killed by hunters. However, these deer represented only one-tenth the number of deer that had been born that spring. Over the next two winters, it is estimated that 60,000 deer starved to death.

Today, the Arizona Game Commission carefully manages the Kaibab area. Hunting permits are issued to keep the deer in balance with their range. Predators were re-introduced and are now protected to help keep herds in balance with food supplies. Tragic winter losses are now reduced by keeping the number of deer near the carrying capacity of the range.

Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers

Marco Cascella



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