

Arizona Wildlife Podcast

Transcript: Episode 4 – Predator/Prey Relationships

(Please note: this podcast was recorded live from a public presentation. It was not a rehearsed speech. This transcript attempts to capture the dialogue as it was spoken. At times when the speech was difficult to hear or understand, a good effort was made. These rare cases are noted in the text.)

The content for this episode came from the training day at the 2008 National Envirothon competition. It was originally recorded on July 29, 2008, outdoors at the Flagstaff Arboretum. It consisted of Arizona Game and Fish Department employees providing background information about some of the wildlife and wildlife issues found in the state. It concluded with a question and answer session by the students participating in the competition.

Listen as Sam Huselton, a Department educator, explains the important role that predator/prey relationships play in an ecosystem.

SAM:

Arizona has a lot of predator/prey relationships. Um. What happens when you take a predator out of a population?

STUDENT:

The population of the prey goes unchecked.

SAM:

It goes unchecked. In the past...You're right. In the past, we've had that. Uh, the fact that, that people thought: "If we got rid of all the predators, think of all the game that we could hunt!" Hunters really wanted to kill off the predators. "If we get rid of the predators we're going to have all this wonderful game." Well, that was fine for a few years. But after a couple of years of this, the population exploded. The deer population exploded on the North Kaibab. It's a famous thing that has gone on for years. They've studied it. They took out all the predators. That population exploded. They were getting wonderful deer for a few years, but eventually that population crashed.

ERIC:

Sam, where's the North Kaibab?

SAM:

Oh, yeah, sorry. The North Kaibab is north of the Grand Canyon. Actually, just a little north of where we're at, where we're located right here. The North Kaibab is a fabulous area. It's kind of isolated. And they took out all the mountain lions. They took out all the wolves. They took out most of the bear. And so this population of deer exploded. Unfortunately, because you had a large population of deer, they degraded the habitat so much that the population crashed because a lot of those animals then starved.

So we do have the...um...actually the prey species does control the predators. Okay. If you don't have the prey, you're not going to have the predators. If you don't have the habitat, you're not going to have the prey. So we did, uh, we started bringing the animals back in. We started letting those mountain lions

come back in. Of course, the wolves are not back there yet, but the bear population has gone up. And now they've got a good balance. And we do have trophy deer up there. So it is still a good population.

Um, now that the control for predators is guided by science. It's not guided by the fact that if we get rid of all the predators, we're going to have wonderful deer to hunt. So, a lot of our controls that we use, the management techniques that we use, in Arizona is all done through science. So, we count the populations. We want to make sure that we have enough population for harvest, but we want to make sure we have enough population that we don't degrade the habitat and so that the predators do have enough for themselves to eat. So, it's really important that when we...we reintroduce predators into an area that that has a good population, or prey population. We have done a lot of studies.

The black-footed ferrets are actually located up by Seligman, which is along the I-40. And they did a good population study to make sure that we had enough prairie dogs that could support a black-footed ferret population. And it has done quite well that we have actually expanded into another area where there are prairie dogs. So using the science to make sure that we have a good healthy prey base population for those black-footed ferrets was really important.

It's also very important for the...the Mexican grey wolf, which we've introduced into the high country in the Blue. They had to make sure that we had a good elk and good mule deer population to help support a large population of wolves, and that's something that we wanted to make sure so that they wouldn't go after the cattle that do graze those areas. So, we had to go in and do a lot of studies, make sure that we had a good prey base before we went ahead and introduced a large predator species.

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Thank you.