

# Hunting for an answer in Hawaii's war on deer, wildlife

By Sydney Ross Singer

The dogs did it again yesterday.

Our motley crew of five canine friends found themselves another pig. Of course, dogs just don't find a pig. They tear it up.

I'll save you from all the gory details. But it does expose the ferocious side of canines. I ran back to the house to get a gun. The sooner I put an end to the pig, the less the suffering.

Of course, this is all heart-breaking for an animal lover such as myself. Playing the Angel of Death is necessary for anyone living with animals and close to nature, but that doesn't make it less disturbing.

Actually, we live with what we call an inter-species community, with sheep, milk goats, horses, chickens, ducks, honeybees, fish, dogs and cats, along with all the wildlife that considers our preserve a home. We live close to nature, with solar energy, catchment water, and a commitment to self-suffi-



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ciency and sustainability.

It also means we are witness to all the events of life, and death. Everything is in cycles. And as the stewards of this small world of ours, we must accept all the stages of this cycle.

It's the same problem facing all of Hawaii today. As stewards of these wonderful islands, we must be willing to manage life and death.

Pigs, deer, goats and sheep were brought to Hawaii over the past hundreds of years as a food resource and as a biocontrol for grasses, vines and introduced trees. Much of Hawaii is now composed of weedy plant species that are normally controlled by

wildlife, such as sheep, goats and deer. These animals are in turn normally controlled by predators such as mountain lions, wolves, dogs and people.

But Hawaii is not normal. It is an island that has been colonized by numerous cultures over the years, which brought with them plants and animals from other places. We now have a mixed culture and novel ecosystems consisting of mixed species. And since all of these introductions were done piecemeal and without knowledge of what would happen, our environment can be called anything but stable.

Nevertheless, for many people, it is still a Paradise.

However, times have changed, along with government agendas. Now, the goal seems to be erasing these past introductions. Nativism and nationalism are on the rise, while immigration and multiculturalism are in retreat. In the sphere of environmentalism, this translates into a war on

"invasive species."

In the past, introduced species were considered good; now they are considered bad. Black-and-white thinking results in extreme measures.

The federal and state governments have declared war on the environment today. Tens of thousands of acres of wilderness are being fenced, sprayed with poisons to kill introduced plants, and stripped of wildlife.

Pigs, deer and goats will be caught in snares or traps, or poisoned. Others will die of thirst when fencing blocks the way to water. Shooters from helicopters will slaughter animals on the run, killing some and wounding many others who will die slowly and painfully.

Naturally, you would expect public opposition to this carnage. Surprisingly, the biggest opponents are hunters. Hunting and gathering is an important practice in Hawaii, especially by the rural, local culture. These hunters are the predators

necessary to keep Hawaii's wildlife from becoming a nuisance.

But the government now considers the hunters themselves a nuisance, since their centuries-old lifestyle of hunting and gathering is reliant on species that are now considered "invasive."

My view of hunters has changed over the years, now that I live with animals and in the wild. The hunter is a necessary predator in the food chain, if not for the hunter, then disease, starvation and environment destruction would be the result of these fast-reproducing animals.

Hunters are doing what other carnivorous predators do. And while they are invested in the kill, they are also invested in perpetuating the species for the future. Like other predators, they do not eliminate their prey.

The government, however, wants complete eradication. Areas of the wild are to be fenced and "cleansed" of nonnative species. It has no mercy. It wants no future for these animals.

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