



SUPPORT US



News That Matters ▪ [Support us](#)

*To ensure our independent newsroom has the resources to continue our impactful reporting, we need to raise **\$250,000 by December 31.***



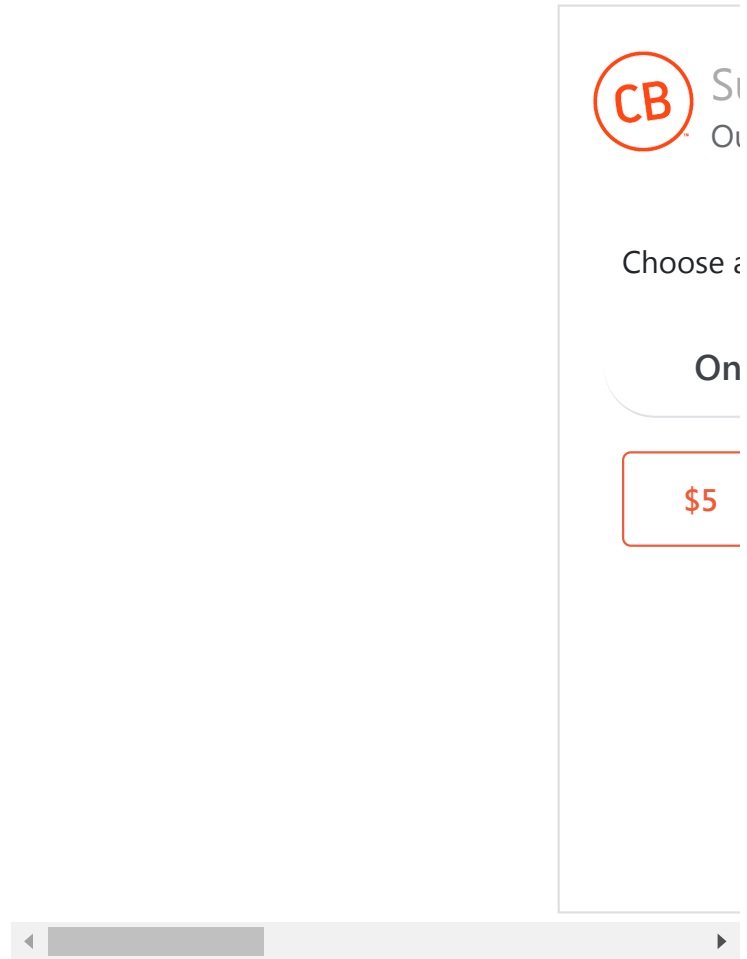
Thanks to 899 donors, we're almost half way to our goal!

GIVE NOW

Maui

17,000 Axis Deer Were Killed On Maui This Year, But They Just Keep Coming

A
herd
recently
threatened
the
Maui



Top Stories



Shootz! Shaka Santa And Tutu Mele Show Up Early For The City Lights Parade





State Worker Charged In Monk Seal Pup Death Repeatedly Let Dogs Off Leash



Another Inmate Dies In An Apparent Suicide At Hawaii's Largest Prison

Nui Botanical Gardens. Hawaii is upping its effort to control the population.

By Thomas Heaton  / November 15, 2024
 Reading time: 6 minutes.

 Share Article

 45

About 50 axis deer crowded around the fence line separating Maui Nui Botanical Gardens and Keopuolani Regional Park, startling the gardens staff on a recent Thursday afternoon.



UH Contract Specifically Hides President Search Details From The Public



Will Exemptions In Honolulu's Empty Homes Tax Bill Water Down Its Effect?



Honolulu Yanks 'Renovation Aloha' Permit After Civil Beat Exposes Illegal Work



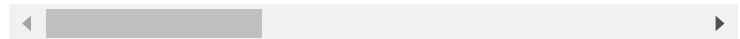
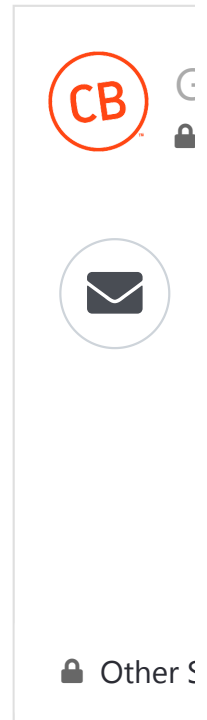
Kirstin Downey: This Ala Moana Cultural Gem Has Been Shut Down Way Too Long

The threat posed by the invasive deer was alarming because the gardens serve as a seed bank and are home to some of Hawaii’s rarest endemic and native plants.

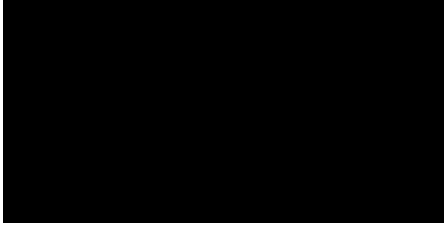
“One night, with a herd like that, and a lot of our garden would be destroyed,” said executive director Tamara Sherrill.

The appearance of deer on the outskirts of [Maui Nui Botanical Gardens](#) is a reminder of the difficulty in containing the ungulates despite the risk they pose to the environment, agriculture and public safety.

Private and public hunters typically kill about 7,000 deer annually across Maui County, which includes Maui, Molokai and Lanai,



but that number rose this year to about 17,000 thanks to permitted control efforts, public hunting and a new incentive program for landowners.



The herd of deer outside Maui Nui Botanical Gardens was the largest its executive director, Tamara Sherrill, had ever seen near the property. (Courtesy: Nameaaaa Hoshino/2024)

The success of the incentive scheme, which offers money in exchange for deer tails, means the state Division of Forestry and Wildlife has invited landowners to apply for another round of funding to reduce their deer populations with a Nov. 25 deadline to submit their proposals and a Dec. 15 start date.

The land adjacent to the botanical gardens is a county-owned park.

Sherrill suspects barking dogs in the park pushed the deer toward the garden fence line on Nov. 7, the largest herd she's seen there in her 20-plus years working with the organization.

“So far we've been lucky the fence has held since I've been here,” Sherrill said.

Deer have long posed a threat to the gardens. A lone buck snuck through a hole in the fence a few years ago, causing minor damage.



Maui Nui Botanicals Gardens borders the country park where a herd of deer was

spotted. (Courtesy: Maui
Nui Botanical
Gardens/2024)

Managing deer on county land is complicated, especially in a park because killing deer there is a public safety problem, Sherrill said.

The state, which has been working alongside Maui County to help alleviate the problem, has issued 17 emergency proclamations since early 2022 to free up money for deer population-control programs.

Axis deer, originally from South Asia, were introduced to Hawaii in the late-1860s when several were gifted to King Kamehameha V and released on Molokai.

About 34,000 deer survive in the islands,

according to DOFAW, almost half the [estimated 2022 population of 60,000](#).

The current population estimate is still almost double the DOFAW's 18,000-head estimate from January. Jeff Bagshaw, a Maui-based outreach specialist for the division, said the difference results from newer and more accurate surveying methods, including drones and infrared imagery.

Paying Big Landowners To Hunt

Studies have found each animal causes \$50-\$275 in damage to agricultural crops annually. A 2012 study found deer cost county farms, ranches

and resorts [over \\$2 million](#).

The 17,000 kill rate for 2024 is on track with the state's goals of eliminating 15,000-20,000 deer annually, a number intended to limit their impact on the landscape while keeping some around for hunting and recreation.

Landowners and state land lessees have become big players in recent control efforts as part of the [DOFAW program](#) that put a price on deer tails of \$25-\$50 apiece. The division was unable to say how many of the 17,000 deer killed this year were connected to the program.

Participants are expected to kill one deer for every 10 acres with a minimum of 50 deer

taken, making the minimum property size 500 acres. During the last cycle that began in January, 17 landowners applied for the program and all of them received funding.

The



Hunting has helped contain the Maui deer population, although some hunters complain about not having enough access to land. (Nathan Eagle/Civil Beat/2022)

program — now in its fourth round — is the most effective control measure, said County Council member Yuki Lei Sugimura, who was instrumental in the 2021 formation of the Maui Axis Deer Task Force.

“It has been making a huge impact,” Sugimura

said. “They figured out how to do it.”

Ranchers are not entirely happy though, as some would like to have night hunting included in eligible harvesting activities under the DOFAW contracts, said Brendan Balthazar, vice president of the Maui Cattlemen’s Council.

Balthazar has run Diamond B Ranch on Maui’s southeastern coast since 1968 and said the impacts of the grass-munching deer have forced ranchers to reduce their cattle herds by half. Balthazar is running just over 420 head of cattle.

This year alone, Balthazar and his cowboys have killed just shy of 450 deer on his ranch through the program.

The state allocated \$6.1 million in the 2024-25 state budget to address the invasive deer, while Maui County has ponied up \$300,000 each for the islands of Maui, Lanai and Molokai.

Landowners and state land lessees on Molokai and Lanai are also eligible for the DOFAW program. The division's efforts to estimate the deer populations on those islands are underway.

A Threat To Crucial Watersheds

The mitigation efforts have not stopped deer from making their way into human settlements, including roadways. They continue to cause car crashes, many of

which go unreported, Yukimura said.

Last May, two does and a stag were spotted trotting through Kahului Airport. There have also been reports of deer posing a risk to airplanes at Kalaupapa Airport on Molokai.

RELATED ARTICLES

Maui Has An Axis Deer Problem. So The State Has Put A Price On Their Tails

The Deer Population Is Devastating Maui. Hunters Want To Help

Reviving Hawaii's Meat Inspection Program Could Also Take Aim At Axis Deer

But the biggest concern of the Division of Forestry and Wildlife is the risk deer pose to watersheds, given their importance in the face of

climate change, fresh water availability and the state's food system.

Killing all the deer is off the table, as communities around the state advocate for keeping them around for food and recreation.

Regulations and expenses make it difficult to [get venison into the food system](#). Balthazar said many of the deer killed on Diamond B Ranch were buried.

Some hunters take issue with the state's approach to deer control, and complain that large landowners are unwilling to let them onto their land to hunt.

Hawaii Grown

This ongoing series delves deep into what it would take for Hawaii to decrease its dependence on imported food and be better positioned to grow its own.

Read More →

The way hunters have historically harvested deer is part of the population issue, creating a lopsided gender ratio, Bagshaw said.

They typically seek deer with larger antlers, and the result is fewer males competing for breeding opportunities.

“The harem’s all the much bigger for the rest of the males,” Bagshaw

said. “Less stress means more sex, that’s just part of the ecology.”

Another part of the ecology is Hawaii’s lack of predators — other than humans.

In South Asia, the deer’s native range, the population ratio is one-to-one, female to male, but DOFAW estimates Maui has nine does for every buck. The deer’s natural predators in South Asia — tigers, leopard, crocodiles, wolves and pythons — generally kill does and bucks in equal numbers.

Civil Beat’s coverage of Maui County is supported in part by a grant from the Nuestro Futuro Foundation.

[“Hawaii Grown”](#) is funded in part by grants from the Stupski

*Foundation, Ulupono
Fund at the Hawaii
Community Foundation
and the Frost Family
Foundation.*

What stories will you help make possible in 2025?

Civil Beat's reporting has helped paint a more complete picture of Hawaii with stories that you won't find anywhere else.

[Your donation today](#) will support Civil Beat's year-end campaign and ensure that our newsroom has the resources to provide you with thorough, unbiased reporting on the issues that matter most to Hawaii.

[Give now. We can't do this without you.](#)

CONTRIBUTE

About the Author



**Thomas
Heaton**



Thomas Heaton is a reporter for Civil Beat. You can reach him by email at theaton@civilbeat.org or follow him on Twitter at [@thomasheaton](https://twitter.com/thomasheaton)

**Use the
RSS feed
to
subscribe
to
Thomas
Heaton's
posts
today**