Subject: : Conservation
Topic: : Blue Herons
Re: Blue Herons
Author: : pcray1231
Date: : 2009/8/24 9:40:20
URL:

Chaz, I agree media should be unbiased, but there is no such thing as completely unbiased. We are talking about something made by people, and judged by people, with varying backgrounds and opinions. Some stories are slanted to the left, others to the right, and biased people judge the bias of the organizations by how many of each category they run.

SonofZ3, your speaking about natural balance, which doesn't exist, due to natural variation. The classic predator-prey models are very simplistic as they don't take into account time of year variations, and other food sources. Of any species, the population is governed by the available food in the LEANEST times, as well as predation and pollution type stuff. You mentioned that deer are overabundant, so we'll use that example. In spring and summer, there's plenty of food available, if the whole year were like that then deer are underabundant. From a food perspective, its fall and winter that decides the population. Mast crop and, in farming country, corn, gives them enough fat to make it through the winter. If there's enough mast crop left they can eat all winter, provided the snow isn't too deep and crusted to get to it. Thus, the actual, biological carrying capacity in any location varies widely from year to year, based on the mast crop, farming practices, and snow depth (how long the snow stays deep is important too). The herd exceeds carrying capacities in years with a poor mast crop and/or a winter with snow cover for long periods, and we get winter kill. In milder winters or years with a strong mast crop, the actual deer herd doesn't even sniff the true carrying capacity of the forest.

As for predation, we'll use coyotes as an example. They take a pretty good number of fawns during a short time period in the late spring, when the fawns are vulnerable. Because its such a short time period of riches, and not the leanest one for coyotes, the availability of fawns has little effect on coyote populations. Coyotes don't count on deer for survival, but they'll take them when they can. Thus, they'll take about the same number each year. With a large deer herd, coyotes don't make much difference, there's just too many fawns for them to make a dent in that short of a time period. With a smaller deer herd, the same number of fawns taken by coyotes is suddenly a much larger percentage of the total, and it has a bigger effect on deer populations. There is no balance, but there is cause and effect. The effect of coyotes on deer population is greater when the deer population is smaller, the exact opposite of classic predator-prey models.

Back to herons. DDT may be playing a big part. But if its food availability, herons will do much better in low water situations, so their population is probably governed by the food available in the spring, when the waters are the highest and food will be leanest. The problem is that this is the exact moment when we feed them by the bucket full out of big white trucks, and since some of those fish can be hard to catch, we also stick hooks in their gills and release them to die for the herons to clean up.