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30 November 2023

Lauren Dennhardt
Catalina Island Conservancy
PO Box 2739
Avalon, CA 90704

Dear Dr. Dennhardt,

I am a professor at the University of California, Davis, and I have been doing research on introduced herbivores in island ecosystems for over 40 years. In my opinion, the removal of introduced mule deer from Santa Catalina Island is essential for sound management of island resources. The reason is the damage that introduced herbivores do, and especially in the context of the vulnerability of island species. Plants on islands like Santa Catalina evolved in the absence of herbivores, hence these plants tend to lose their defenses against herbivores. When exotic herbivores are introduced, the consequences are usually devastating, with wholesale destruction of plant communities. But the damage is not limited to plants; animals that depend on plants for habitat are also impacted. Some managers consider density reduction as a solution, instead of eradication. However, reducing deer density will not solve the problem because the plant community is already damaged, and reduced deer numbers will only maintain that damage; also, island plants lack defenses against even low densities of herbivores. Hence, complete removal of introduced mule deer is the only way to conserve island plants and the island vertebrates that depend on these plants for habitat.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dirk H. Van Vuren".

Dirk H. Van Vuren
Professor of Wildlife Biology