

Fall 2023/Winter2024 Field Report

In the early morning hours of January 27th, Doe #100 awoke in an Amazon Avenue yard and strolled off into the woods after being spayed by a veterinarian. She was the fifth and final deer treated during Clifton Deer's 2023/2024 field season. Have she and Doe #1, the first doe spayed eight years earlier who, at age 14.5+, is still roaming the neighborhood with her family, met and compared notes? If so, neither are saying!

With another year in the books for the Clifton Deer Program, we have more good news to report:

- The deer population in the study area (the ~1 sq. mi. bounded by I-75, Ludlow Ave, and Clifton Ave) is down 8% in the past year and 41% since the program began.
- With about 98% of the adult does in the study area sterilized, births this year were down from 32 fawns per 50 adult does when the program began to just one fawn per 50 adult does.
- Thanks to our local volunteers and the UCAN Nonprofit Pet Care Clinic, our annual operating costs remain low (\$6,000 to \$8,000) for the fourth year in a row.

Now what? Good question! While immigration to date has been modest, we saw a small uptick this year, even as mortality among our aging herd remains surprisingly low. (Fun fact: more than 45% of our tagged does are now between the ages of 10 and 14+ -- that's old for wild deer!). If mortality remains low over the next few years and immigration increases, population levels could plateau or even increase slightly in the short term. If on the other hand immigration remains steady as a significant percentage of our older deer reach the end of their natural lifespans, we could see a few years of rapid decline before the population levels off. Whatever happens, we'll be carefully watching and reporting to the community, and of course treating any new immigrants to the herd until the population reaches an eco-sustainable level.

Our celebration of this year's good news is tinged with sadness, however. CliftonDeer.org co-founder, Vice President, and Parks Liaison, Bob Rack, died on March 20, 2024. Bob played an essential role in launching the Clifton Deer Program and making it a success, and those of us lucky enough to have worked alongside him will do our best to emulate his leadership, tenacity, problem-solving skills, good humor, and love and respect for our beautiful Clifton parks and the creatures who call them home as the Program moves forward.

The Clifton Deer Program is grateful to our generous donors, enthusiastic and unflappable volunteers, and the gracious neighbors who volunteer their yards for bait sites and who report deer sightings through the "Report Tagged Deer" portal at www.cliftondeer.org.