

MEDIA RELEASE

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Deer become nocturnal to avoid people

BEIJING—Scientists have discovered that a tropical deer in southern China that was almost hunted to extinction two decades ago becomes nocturnal when living near people. Hunting of the deer stopped decades ago, but the deer still view people as predators.

Only 26 Eld's deer remained in 1976, inside a small reserve on the Chinese island of Hainan. Strong protection and conservation efforts saw the population grow to over 1500 animals, many more than the small reserve could support.

The Chinese government was forced to reintroduce deer populations around the island.

Yanling Song and colleagues from the Chinese Academy of Sciences report their observations in an upcoming issue of *AMBIO – Journal of the Human Environment*.

“As a species that was, at least until the last twenty years, heavily hunted by humans, these reintroductions allow us to investigate aspects of behavior and ecology not possible for other animals”, says Song.

The research team studied a group of deer moved from a human-free reserve to an area near several small villages. They found that deer began acting differently immediately, but that the overall change took many months to complete.

The deer became increasingly nocturnal and were most active when the local villagers were least active, says Song.

“It appears that translocated deer adapted over time to human disturbance and this pattern is similar to that of other species during periods of hunting,” the team writes.

Conflict between humans and wildlife is inevitable, particularly in densely populated countries like China. Deer have been able to adopt a new set of behaviors, but the consequences remain unknown.

Eld's deer are culturally important to the ethnic people of Hainan island and now play a key role in tourism.

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Notes to editors

Kexue Communications is a scientific communication company headquartered in Beijing that works with Chinese researchers, organizations, education centres and media to assist in the dissemination of science.

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