

Coronavirus has been detected in whitetail deer in several states. The possibility that our deer may be infected exists. (Courtesy photo)

CORONAVIRUS IN DEER

This column is dedicated to my good friend Dennis, who just last month crossed the last horizon because of this dreadful disease. Until we meet again, old friend.

In an article I recently wrote for a magazine, I mentioned that COVID will be the defining moment for our generation. People will refer to this as before COVID and after COVID, like previous generations who were “before the Depression and after the Depression” or “before the War or after the War.”

Long time readers of my column know that I try and stay away from politics, religion and just about anything controversial unless it negatively affects hunting, fishing and the outdoors. Well, the coronavirus has crossed that line.

Just like the rest of you, I am completely fed up with the whole thing. Whenever it seems we are getting out of this mess, we get a resurgence and a new variant. My wife and I have both worked front line in the battle with this epidemic since it began. We do our best to follow the guidance of the medical experts, and this still lingers on.

The patience of all



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

parties involved is nearly exhausted and we all want to move on with our lives. I have had four hunting trips cancelled, two in Argentina and two in Canada because of the virus.

Countries are starting to open some, but you still must be prepared for major delays and inconveniences, like rapid tests, proof of vaccination, face coverings, especially if you wish to travel the friendly skies.

Hunting has always been my happy place, along with fishing, and even during the pandemic, I found a way to partake in the sports as often as possible. I always thought this outdoor column would be a place where the pandemic could not touch us, as we would just write about hiking, camping, animals, and everything outdoor related.

Now it has become apparent that the corona-

virus has crossed the line to one of my favorite animals of all time, the deer. The deer is the animal that represents hunting and the woods to me, and I learned about them from my old man mentor half a century ago.

In a study published in early November, veterinarians at Pennsylvania State University found active SARS-CoV-2 infections in at least 30% of whitetail deer tested positive across Iowa during 2020.

I am not sure what prompted doctors to start giving COVID tests to deer, but the findings were verified by the scientists at the National Veterinary Services Laboratories.

This all follows a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) study in August that showed 40% of the deer population in the Northeast and the Midwest to have antibodies against SARS-CoV-2. Just to be clear, SARS-CoV-2 is the virus that causes the disease COVID-19.

None of the deer showed any clinical symptoms of the virus according to the studies. A positive test does not necessarily indicate deer had active infections. The

USDA study came to no conclusions about how the deer were exposed. It is possible they were exposed through people, the environment, other deer, or perhaps other animal species. Maybe the deer were not practicing social distancing and wearing masks.

The deer were studied in Illinois, Michigan, New York and Pennsylvania. The USDA tested 481 deer and found 33% were positive for SARS-CoV-2 antibodies. The highest positive tests came from Michigan where 67% of 113 samples testing positive, and lowest in Illinois where 7% of 101 samples were positive.

In the past, there have been transmissions between humans and animals, including animals in zoos and a mink farm, where the virus spread, mutated, then reinfected humans in several cases. Researchers already knew whitetail deer were capable of infection because they have similar receptors as found in humans.

The USDA said, “Widespread human infections with SARS-CoV-2 combined with human-wildlife interactions create the potential for spillover between people and animals. There is a potential

for an animal reservoir where the virus spreads and mutates among a new host, in this case the deer, and not cause illness in the host but could re-infect recovering human populations and cause illness.”

For the record, there are some 30 million whitetail deer across the United States, and a fair population in Colorado, especially on the Eastern Plains. To date, there have been no cases of humans contracting COVID-19 from eating food, including game meat, but USDA recommends all hunters keep hunting and practice the standard precautions typically used when processing wild game, like venison, including wearing protective gloves, a mask, and thoroughly cooking the meat before consumption.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) has no current cases of the coronavirus in mule deer in Colorado at this time. I might point out, that nobody is currently studying this yet. There is a big cloud of uncertainty whether this virus will affect moose, elk, pronghorn, sheep, and mountain goats as time marches on.

I had a nightmare over this whole thing, where deer were wearing masks, practicing social distancing, and lining up to get nasal swabs for a COVID test. Other deer were lining up to get vaccinations, while the older bucks and does were getting booster shots.

The deer have had a really rough time of late. Our populations of mule deer have paid a heavy toll because of things like the drought, mountain lions, loss of habitat, and a surge in chronic wasting disease. This COVID-19 is something we need to take seriously and get a handle on already, for the people and the wildlife.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press, Delta County Independent, and several other newspapers, as well as a feature writer for several saltwater fishing magazines.

He is an avid hunter and world class saltwater angler, who travels around the world in search of adventure and serves as a director and public information officer for the Montrose County Sheriff's posse. For information about the posse, call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

Saturday Sweet Christmas Savings

SAVE 20%-50% STOREWIDE!

PICK A FREE PACKAGE OF CANDY TO REVEAL A 20%-50% SAVINGS ON YOUR ENTIRE PURCHASE!

Enjoy Mary's Famous Cookies while you shop!



Saturday, December 11th 9AM-6PM.
Nothing Excluded; Cannot combine with other discounts.
Customer will receive the highest possible discount on Sale/Clearance merchandise items.

10 SOUTH SELIG AVE

MONTROSE, COLORADO 81401

970-249-4226