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FORAGE CONDITIONS POOR  
FOR DEER IN KAIBAB FOREST

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A brief winter investigation of conditions affecting the deer on the Kaibab National Forest in northern Arizona has just been completed, in continuation of studies of the Kaibab deer problem that have been in progress since 1922 under the direction of the Biological Survey, United States Department of Agriculture, in cooperation with the Forest Service of the same department, and the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior. The present investigation indicates that on account of the overgrazed condition of their range the deer are forced to feed largely on sage brush and juniper.

On the winter range on the eastern side of the Kaibab Plateau the deer seemed to be in fairly good condition, but on the western side, where there is a greater concentration of the animals, they were found much emaciated. Within a comparatively small area the carcasses of 23 deer were found, most of which had died of starvation, though some might have been killed by predatory animals. A large number of fawns known to have been born last summer have already died of starvation, and this probably accounts in some measure for the lack of increase in the herds during the year.

The investigations have revealed that there are more deer on the range than the available forage will support, and that unless many of the animals are removed the greater part of the feed there will be killed out. The deer are now concentrated on the winter ranges along the basal slopes of the Kaibab

Plateau, the higher part of which at this season is deeply covered with snow.

After the creation in 1906 of the Grand Canyon Game Preserve, which has boundaries nearly identical with those of the Kaibab National Forest, no killing of the deer was permitted there until 1924, when a few hundred were removed in this way. They were further protected through the killing of large numbers of the predatory animals that formerly tended to check their increase. From a comparatively small number in 1906, perhaps 3,000, the deer increased until in 1922 when it was estimated there were 20,000, perhaps a fourth or a third of which ranged in summer on the Grand Canyon National Park. In the summer of 1924, a committee appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture to study the problem of dealing with the surplus estimated the number at 30,000, a total that some of the government experts and local residents believed conservative.

This great increase over the original numbers of deer has led to the overutilization and destruction of forage at the present time. Legal complications concerning jurisdiction have thus far prevented carrying out plans initiated by the Forest Service for hunting on a large scale. Even if there should be a material reduction in the numbers of the deer, however, it would take many years, according to the investigators, to restore the full forage-producing capacity of both summer and winter ranges. A few hundred of the deer are killed each autumn under the State law, whereas officials of the Department of Agriculture recommend that thousands be removed in order to prevent the destruction of the forage for all that would support reasonable numbers. This destruction has now progressed until all forest reproduction is threatened.