

Editorial submitted to the Hawaii Tribune Herald

Threat of Axis Deer

Recently in the news it seems that there has been a spate of coverage about invasive species with snakes, horned lizards, and flying squirrels making headlines. While I do want to prevent these exotic animals from making their homes here in Hawai'i, I wanted to draw some attention to another animal that is already here in Hawai'i, and could pose a threat to our home here on the Big Island.

Axis deer have established populations on the islands of Lana'i, Moloka'i and Maui. Most recently, the August 3, 2011 issue of The Maui News ran the article "D'oh! A Deer" that highlighted the devastating effects that axis deer has had on the people of Maui. With a voracious appetite, the deer are not picky when it comes to food. From pineapple to sugar cane to vegetables in local gardens, the deer does not discriminate in its diet. Their foraging also creates problems for ranchers as the deer can wipe out large grassy fields that their herds use as grazing areas. Add to this the fact that the deer's feces can carry diseases that can be passed on to people and it becomes clear that axis deer is a serious problem.

What would a population of axis deer mean for the Big Island? Coffee and macadamia nut farms have been longstanding industries for the Big Island, with our burgeoning Ka'u coffee industry beginning to receive international attention. The demand for ono local beef from our ranches in Ka'u, Waimea, and other parts of the Big Island has grown as people heed the call to eat local. Also, our nurseries and beautiful anthurium farms - imagine the ravaging effects a herd of axis deer could have on these industries.

As outlined in the May 28, 2011 Honolulu Star Advertiser and based on the best evidence I have available to me, I believe that axis deer may be making its way to the Big Island. Knowing the negative impacts that will occur to the environment and our local industry, I am doing everything in my power to prevent this animal from establishing itself on the Big Island.

By working with the State Department of Agriculture, the State Department of Land and Natural Resources, the State Department of the Attorney General, and the Governor, I am hoping to nip this problem in the bud. I am working with DLNR to change Hawai'i Administrative Rule 13-124 to designate axis deer as an injurious species to ensure that its possession and potential transport between islands is regulated. This is meant as an interim step to limit any transport of axis deer to the Big Island until the upcoming 2012 Legislative Session where I plan to introduce legislation meant to more permanently address this issue.

I cannot stress how vital I believe this issue is to the health of our local economy and ecosystem. I will continue to push for awareness on this issue, knowing that with early action we can protect our home, the Big Island.

State Sen. Gilbert Kahele

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