

LAB _____, NATURAL CONTROLS OF POPULATIONS

The size of populations in a community are regulated in many ways. Some of the controls acting on populations are:

- the amount of food and water available to feed the population
- the amount of nesting sites available to support raising young
- the size of the predator population
- the amount of disease and parasites infecting the population

Because of these limitations a certain area can only support a certain size population of each type of organism. The population size of each creature that the environment can support is called the **carrying capacity** of that community. This limit represents how many of a certain species that can survive in that area.

In this lab we will study two real life examples of populations, their natural controls, and the carrying capacity of their community.

The Kaibab Deer

In the early 1900s, the Kaibab plateau, north of the Grand Canyon in Arizona, supported a population of about 4000 deer on over 700,000 acres. Predators, such as coyotes, wolves, and pumas, helped to keep the deer population in check. It was estimated at the time that the plateau had a carrying capacity of about 30,000 deer, so that there seemed to be plenty of food for the population that existed.

Ranchers who moved into the area lost many sheep and cattle to the predators. Then on November 28th, 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt created the Grand Canyon National Game Preserve to protect the "finest deer herd in America." In an effort to save livestock and increase the deer population for tourists, the Forest Service tried to exterminate the predators of the deer. Between 1907 and 1923, 815 mountain lions, 30 wolves, 7388 coyotes and more than 500 bobcats were killed.

With the successful removal of many of the predators, the deer herd increased dramatically. But signs that the deer population was out of control began to appear as early as 1920 and the range (the deer habitat) was beginning to deteriorate rapidly. The food supply was being overgrazed by the high population of deer. Trees and grass were being damaged to the point they couldn't recover for next year's growing season. Soon there wasn't enough food to feed the growing population. By 1923, the deer were reported to be on the verge of starvation and the range conditions were described as "deplorable."

The Kaibab Deer Investigating Committee recommended that the number of deer be cut in half as quickly as possible. Hunting was allowed, and during the fall of 1924, 875 deer were killed by hunters. However, these deer represented only one-tenth the number of deer that had been born that spring. Over the next two winters, it is estimated that 60,000 deer starved to death.

Today, the Arizona Game Commission carefully manages the Kaibab area. Hunting permits are issued to keep the deer in balance with their range. Predators were re-introduced and are now protected to help keep herds in balance with food supplies. Tragic winter losses are now reduced by keeping the number of deer near the carrying capacity of the range.

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Table of Contents Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers

1. Understanding the eBook Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers
 - The Rise of Digital Reading Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers
 - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers
 - Exploring Different Genres
 - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
 - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
 - Popular eBook Platforms
 - Features to Look for in an Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers
 - User-Friendly Interface
4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers
 - Personalized Recommendations
 - Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers User Reviews and Ratings
 - Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers and Bestseller Lists
5. Accessing Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers Free and Paid eBooks

- Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers Public Domain eBooks
- Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers eBook Subscription Services
- Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers Budget-Friendly Options
- 6. Navigating Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers eBook Formats
 - ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
 - Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers Compatibility with Devices
 - Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers Enhanced eBook Features
- 7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
 - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers
 - Highlighting and Note-Taking Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers
 - Interactive Elements Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers
- 8. Staying Engaged with Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers
 - Joining Online Reading Communities
 - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
 - Following Authors and Publishers Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers
- 9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers
 - Benefits of a Digital Library
 - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers
- 10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
 - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
 - Minimizing Distractions
 - Managing Screen Time
- 11. Cultivating a Reading Routine Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers
 - Setting Reading Goals Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers
 - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
- 12. Sourcing Reliable Information of Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers
 - Fact-Checking eBook Content of Lab Natural Controls Of Populations Answers
 - Distinguishing Credible Sources
- 13. Promoting Lifelong Learning
 - Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development

- Exploring Educational eBooks

14. Embracing eBook Trends

- Integration of Multimedia Elements
- Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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