Deer moms come to the rescueâ€”sometimes

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

MothÂ-ers in one deer speÂ-cies seem reÂ-markably genÂ-erÂ-ous in deÂ-fendÂ-ing othÂ-er parÂ-entsâ€™ kids, a study has foundâ€”but anothÂ-er deer speÂ-cies disÂ-plays much less galÂ-lantÂ-ry.The two speÂ-cies reÂ-sponded difÂ-ferÂ-ently to fawnsâ€™ recorded disÂ-tress calls, acÂ-cordÂ-ing to SuÂ-san LinÂ-gle, who conÂ-ducted the reÂ-search as a postÂ-docÂ-torÂ-al felÂ-low at the UnÂ-iversÂ-iÂ-ties of AlÂ-berÂ-ta and of LethÂ-bridge, both in CanÂ-aÂ-da.

LinÂ-gle used speakÂ-ers to broadÂ-cast calls of fawns unÂ-der threat, such as when they face a coyÂ-ote atÂ-tack, toÂ-ward adult deer. Mule deer fawns with their mothÂ-er. (CourÂ-teÂ-sy YelÂ-lowÂ-stone Nat'l Park)

WhiteÂ-tail deer mothÂ-ers ran to help only in reÂ-sponse to their own speÂ-ciesâ€™ call, and only when their own offÂ-spring was out of sight, she reÂ-ported. But mule deer mothÂ-ers anÂ-swered calls of both speÂ-ciesâ€™ fawns, even when their own fawn stood next to them so they had no reaÂ-son to beÂ-lieve their own was in trouÂ-ble. â€œThe fact that mule deer ran to the speakÂ-er when their own fawn was standÂ-ing next to them safe and sound reÂ-vealed they do not help othÂ-er fawns beÂ-cause they misÂ-take them for their own,â€• she said. â€œIt was surÂ-prisÂ-ing just how inÂ-disÂ-crimÂ-iÂ-nate mule deer feÂ-males were. For exÂ-amÂ-ple, the feÂ-males that werenâ€™t even mothÂ-ers alÂ-so ran to the speakÂ-ers to help fawns. That would not be exÂ-pected if feÂ-males were simply tryÂ-ing to proÂ-tect their own fawns.â€•The findÂ-ings apÂ-pear in this monÂ-thâ€™s isÂ-sue of the reÂ-search jourÂ-nal AnÂ-iÂ-mal Behavior.Mule deer came to the speakÂ-er and stayed there as long as the disÂ-tress calls played, twistÂ-ing and turnÂ-ing as they conÂ-fronted perÂ-ceived atÂ-tackers, LinÂ-gle said. WhiteÂ-tail mothÂ-ers came near the speakÂ-er briefÂ-ly, then tended to withÂ-draw right away.While the findÂ-ings seem to hail mule deer as suÂ-peÂ-riÂ-or mothÂ-ers, their moÂ-tivaÂ-tÂ-ion for proÂ-tecting othÂ-er fawns is likely based not on alÂ-truÂ-ism but on surÂ-vivÂ-al, said LinÂ-gle.â€œHavÂ-ing a rigÂ-id and agÂ-gresÂ-sive reÂ-sponse to the simÂ-ple sound of a fawn disÂ-tress call may enÂ-sure efÂ-fecÂ-tive defense of a feÂ-maleâ€™s own offÂ-spring, even though this means the feÂ-male inÂ-vests time and enÂ-erÂ-gy and puts herÂ-self at risk by helpÂ-ing many othÂ-er anÂ-iÂ-mals. In conÂ-trast, a whiteÂ-tail mothÂ-er waits to asÂ-sess whethÂ-er a fawn is her own beÂ-fore she steps in to deÂ-fend it. As a reÂ-sult, whiteÂ-tail fawns sufÂ-fer conÂ-sidÂ-erably more predaÂ-tÂ-ion durÂ-ing the first months of life than do mule deer fawns.â€•Mule deer may have deÂ-velÂ-oped a more efÂ-fecÂ-tive agÂ-gresÂ-sive defense beÂ-cause they rely on fightÂ-ing to fend off predaÂ-tors year-round, LinÂ-gle added. WhiteÂ-tails and many othÂ-er speÂ-cies reÂ-strict agÂ-gresÂ-sive defense to just the youngest fawns. WhiteÂ-tails rely on flight rathÂ-er than fight for most of their lives, so this may hamÂ-per their abilÂ-ity to mount an agÂ-gresÂ-sive defense, LinÂ-gle said.

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