

Sniper hired to take out 200 Phoenix Park deer

THE Office of Public Works hired a sniper to kill more than 200 deer in the Phoenix Park in the past two years.

A meat supplier bought the carcasses for €19,488 and sold the meat on to butchers and several supermarkets.

The 203 deer were shot by the marksman as part of eight culls carried out in 2016 and 2017.

A further 57 of the animals were killed as a result of road accidents and natural causes during the same period.

The OPW said that the Phoenix Park remained open to the public while the culls were performed by a 68-year-old sniper from Bray, Co. Wicklow.

However, it said that a

By **Darragh McDonagh**

'detailed protocol' was followed, which took account of the welfare of the deer and the safety of the public.

The carcasses of the culled deer were sold for an average of €96 each to a Wicklow-based meat supplier.

'An over-abundant deer population can result in increasing incidence of road traffic accidents and increase the potential role for deer in the epidemiology of specific diseases,' an OPW spokeswoman said.

A cull of 38 female and 11 male deer over two days in January and February 2017 reduced the herd to 540, compared with

570 recorded in October 2016.

A further two culls were carried out in November 2017, during which an additional 43 deer were killed.

In total, 111 deer were shot during four culls carried out during 2016, while 92 deer were culled over four days last year.

The figures, which were released under the Freedom of Information Act, also show that 38 deer were killed as a result of road accidents and other causes in 2016, while 19 died in this manner last year. A spokesperson for the OPW said that the causes of these deaths included traffic accidents, injuries sustained during the 'rutting' season, and other causes.

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

Science gives answers... but our world is still a miracle

I BEHOLD the sky, that ocean of blue under which we live, labour and love. A single white cloud seems to smile at me. 'Someday,' it seems to say, 'you shall drink me, and I shall nourish your soul.'

I smile back and am taken into space. I behold the moon sitting there among the stars. The sun has extinguished their golden light, but the moon continues to glow.

I behold the endless expanse, the infinitude of the heavens. What is outside the universe, beyond the fabric of space and time? I look deeply but am lost for words.

I behold the soil beneath my feet, the grass in the gardens and the fields. They call it 'muck' and 'dirt', but this is the realm of miracles. The cloud falls from the sky, and as the sun raises it up, a kingdom of beauty is born.

I behold the fresh daffodils, a new growth of grass and the wild herbs as they spring from the soil. All that we could ever want is right here: food, beauty and the wonders of an eco-system that sustains everything. I behold, and I give praise.

I behold the trees in whose shade I now stand. Tiny green leaves are about to erupt from their cocoon. I am taken back to the sky where the mighty fire beckons them to break free.

I behold the birds of the air as they perch high upon the branches. They sing to the world before soaring downwards to feed from the soil. For the garden is their Eden too, a place of abundance where nothing is off-limits.

I behold the fresh water as it trickles by. Stop and listen, for it too sings to the soul. Nothing calms like the melody of flowing water. It is the voice of creation.

I look deeply into the water and, at first, I see only myself. But then, I behold the sun, the clouds, the moon and stars. It is the source of life because it sustains it all.

I hear the sound of children playing. Small screams of joy as they jump and run. This, too, is the voice of life – the voice of those who rank first in the kingdom of Heaven.

I behold the animals as they struggle for survival. A coy cat

sneaks around a garden gate. It pretends to be doing nothing until it pounces for its prey. It's too late: the bird has sought sanctuary in the sky.

I behold the dogs as they pursue nature's secrets. They are alive to the world and take pleasure in it. Some saunter while others speed, their owners being dragged in all directions.

I behold the great sea, which mirrors the sky. I behold its mighty cargo and ponder how it stays afloat. Science provides the answer but, to me, it is still a minor miracle.

I behold the dead foliage lying on grass. Even now, in death, it continues to give life. For, in nature, death is not the enemy, but is the other side of existence.

What falls from the branch is food for the soil. It nourishes and replenishes so that the cycle of life can start again. Fertilisation demands death, but only because, in truth, life never ends.

I behold the air that I breathe, every second of every day. Where does the air come from? It is granted as a gift but rarely received as such.

With each breath, I inhale the world. Whatever is in the air becomes part of me. I am what I breathe.

THE mystics say that we do not breathe but are breathed. We do not choose to breathe, nor can we cease to do so for more than a few seconds. I am completely dependent on the breath for all that I am.

I stop and behold it all: the sun, sky, soil, you and me. I take a deep breath and offer thanks for the fact that, so long as I can inhale, I am still alive to the beauty and wonder of life. As I remove my shoes, I give thanks for these feet without which I could not have touched our precious earth.

And then, as I shut the door on all that I have seen, I open my heart in gratitude for the sense of sight, sound, smell, touch and taste.

I open my heart because what I just experienced was not simply a daily walk. It was a foretaste of paradise.

—mark.dooley@dailymail.ie—

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