

Crisis in the Wild: Investigating Chronic Wasting Disease's Impact on Animal Populations

Kasper Morkos*

Department of Wildlife Resources, Utah State University, Logan, Utah, USA

Introduction

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) has emerged as a significant threat to animal populations, particularly deer, elk, and moose. This neurodegenerative disease, similar to mad cow disease in cattle and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in humans, has been spreading across various regions, causing alarm among wildlife biologists and conservationists. This article delves into the crisis in the wild caused by CWD and explores its impact on animal populations. Chronic Wasting Disease, also known as CWD, belongs to the family of transmissible spongiform Encephalopathies (TSEs). It affects the central nervous system of cervids, primarily deer, elk, and moose. The disease is caused by misfolded proteins known as prions, which accumulate in the brain, spinal cord, and lymphoid tissues of infected animals. CWD is highly contagious and has an extended incubation period, making it difficult to detect and control.

Description

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) has become a topic of significant concern among wildlife biologists, conservationists, and policymakers. Its impact on animal populations, ecosystems, and economies has prompted extensive research and management efforts. In this discussion, we will explore various aspects of CWD and delve into its implications for wildlife and society. CWD is primarily transmitted through direct contact with bodily fluids, faeces, and contaminated environments. The highly contagious nature of the disease contributes to its rapid spread among animal populations. Additionally, human activities, such as game farming, wildlife trade, and the movement of infected animals, have facilitated the geographical expansion of CWD. Understanding the mechanisms of transmission is crucial for developing effective management strategies and preventing further spread [1].

The impact of CWD extends beyond individual animals and affects entire ecosystems. Deer, elk, and moose play essential roles in shaping plant communities through their browsing behavior. With declining populations due to CWD, there can be a shift in vegetation dynamics, affecting the abundance and distribution of plant species. Furthermore, altered predator-prey dynamics and changes in herbivory patterns can have cascading effects on other wildlife species, potentially disrupting the balance of ecosystems. CWD poses a threat to genetic diversity within animal populations. As infected individuals die, genetic lineages may be lost, leading to reduced genetic variability. Genetic diversity is crucial for species' resilience and adaptability in the face of environmental changes [2]. The loss of genetic diversity due to CWD can impair the long-term viability of populations and their ability to cope with future challenges, such as climate change or emerging diseases.

The economic consequences of CWD are significant, particularly in regions where hunting and wildlife tourism contribute to local economies. CWD's presence can lead to reduced hunting opportunities, lower license sales, and a decline in revenue generated from associated industries. This loss of economic

*Address for Correspondence: Kasper Morkos, Department of Wildlife Resources, Utah State University, Logan, Utah, USA, E-mail: morkos@kasper.harvard.edu

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activity can have far-reaching implications for local communities, businesses, and job opportunities. Furthermore, CWD raises concerns regarding public health and food safety. While there is currently no evidence to suggest that CWD can infect humans, it is essential to exercise caution when handling and consuming meat from infected animals. Public education campaigns are necessary to raise awareness and promote safe practices [3].

Detecting and managing CWD presents several challenges. The disease has a long incubation period, making it difficult to identify infected animals until clinical symptoms manifest. By this stage, the disease may have already spread within the population. Furthermore, conventional diagnostic tests often require post-mortem analysis, limiting the ability to monitor and control the disease in live animals effectively. Implementing management strategies for CWD is complex due to its contagious nature and environmental persistence [4]. Culling infected animals, implementing feeding bans, and establishing containment zones are common approaches used to control the spread. However, the effectiveness of these measures and their long-term ecological implications remain subjects of on-going research and debate. Continued research is essential for advancing our understanding of CWD and developing effective strategies for its management.

On-going efforts focus on improving diagnostic techniques, studying the genetic factors influencing susceptibility and resistance, and exploring potential treatments or vaccines. Long-term monitoring and surveillance programs are critical for tracking the disease's prevalence, distribution, and impact on animal populations. Collaboration between scientists, policymakers, and stakeholders is vital in addressing the crisis posed by CWD. Coordinated efforts at regional, national, and international levels can help establish standardized protocols, share best practices, and allocate resources effectively [5]. Public engagement and education are also crucial for fostering awareness, promoting responsible practices, and facilitating support for conservation initiatives.

Conclusion

Scientists and wildlife managers have been working tirelessly to better understand CWD and develop effective management strategies. On-going research focuses on early detection, surveillance methods, and potential treatments or vaccines. Some management approaches include culling infected animals, implementing feeding bans, and establishing containment zones to control the spread of the disease. However, the effectiveness of these measures is still a subject of debate. Chronic Wasting Disease poses a significant crisis in the wild, impacting animal populations, ecosystems, and economies. The disease's contagious nature and long incubation period present challenges for effective management. Urgent action is required to enhance surveillance, develop reliable diagnostic tools, and implement strategies to prevent the further spread of CWD. By addressing this crisis, we can strive to safeguard animal populations and preserve the balance of our natural ecosystems for future generations.

Acknowledgement

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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