



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Wildebeest are species of antelope found in southern Africa. The wildebeest herd in Serengeti National Park, Tanzania, is the largest herbivore herd on Earth. Scientists began monitoring the sizes of the Serengeti's large mammal populations in the 1960s. Over the next few decades, they noticed something unusual: the wildebeest population was increasing at a rate much faster than before. The scientists determined that this increase was due to several factors. One factor was a vaccination program that eradicated rinderpest, a viral disease that kills wildebeest.

The rapid growth of the wildebeest population concerned wildlife managers, since rapid population growth sometimes damages ecosystems by using up food and other resources. The managers had to decide whether to control the wildebeest population or let it grow unchecked.