



Avoiding Deer Strikes

November 2023

As if the shift to daylight savings time and the coming holiday season doesn't cause enough distraction in our daily schedules, we must worry about deer strikes. This is the time of year when deer are most active and, with that in mind, now is a good time to review the dangers of animals in the roadway. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety estimates that 1.5 million deer-related accidents occur each year due to the increasing deer population. Deer strikes account for three out of four accidents involving animals. Nationally, collisions between deer and vehicles cause some \$1.1 billion in vehicle damage, kill 150 people, and injure another 29,000 people every year.

Accidents with deer are likely to occur on rural roads with a speed limit of 55 mph or higher, in darkness, or at dusk and dawn. In 60% of the accidents involving human fatalities with animal-vehicle collisions, the fatality was caused not by the collision with the deer, but by failure to wear a safety belt. The animal-vehicle collision is the first event and often not the deadliest. What occurs to the vehicle after the initial collision is often the cause of the fatality; i.e., striking a fixed object or another vehicle(s).

Deer are more active during breeding, migration, and hunting season, increasing the likelihood of crashes from mid-October to mid-December.

Don't count on deer whistles or fences to deter deer from crossing roads in front of you. As a result, you need to always be vigilant, especially in areas prone to animal crossing. Here are some tips for staying safe:

- Constantly scan the road ahead and watch for the reflection of deer eyes and for deer silhouettes on the shoulder of the road. If anything looks slightly suspicious, slow down.
- Slow down in areas with a large deer population; where deer-crossing signs are posted; places where deer commonly crossroads; areas where roads divide agricultural fields from forestland; and whenever in forested areas between dusk and dawn.
- Assume nothing. Deer are unpredictable. Sometimes they stop in the middle of the road. Sometimes they cross and quickly re-cross back from where they came. Sometimes they move toward an approaching vehicle.
- It is safer to hit a deer than to swerve and risk hitting another vehicle or losing control.
- Do not assume trouble has passed completely when a deer successfully crosses the road. Deer frequently travel in groups and the presence of one likely indicates more.
- If there is no opposing traffic, use high beams at night to better illuminate potential deer.
- If a deer remains on the highway after you strike it, report the incident to the game commission or a local law enforcement agency as it poses a danger to other motorists. If the deer might still be alive, don't go near it because a wild animal with sharp hooves can inflict injuries.

Be extra cautious this time of the year, take your time, slow down, be alert and buckle up.