

Agencies warn of increase in vehicle-deer crashes

(MSC News)--Mating season and the quest for more secure habitat have deer on the move this time of year, increasing the chances of vehicle collisions.

Typically, the greatest number of deer-vehicle crashes are in mid-November when the rut, or mating season, peaks. In addition to the rut, deer are also on the move in mid-fall seeking new food sources and shelter as crops are harvested and leaves fall from trees and shrubs, leaving them less secure than in their summer habitats.

“The deer population has stabilized over the last six years, so areas that have had deer likely still have them,” said Levi Jaster, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism Big Game Coordinator. “This time of year, young animals are dispersing to find new places to live and breeding season is approaching. More animals on the move means more of them will be crossing roads, so be extra cautious in areas with good deer habitat.”

According to the Kansas Department of Transportation, 10,226 (17 percent) of the 58,834 vehicle crashes reported in 2017 were deer-related (crashes in which a deer and vehicle actually collided or the presence of a deer was a contributing circumstance). Crashes involving deer occur in every part of the state throughout the year. In 2017, Butler County had 438 vehicle-deer crashes, the most of any county, while Sedgwick County followed with 385 vehicle-deer crashes.

“In addition to potentially causing human injuries and loss of life, deer collisions often cause significant vehicle damage that can lead to large expenses for the vehicle owner if not properly insured,” said Jennifer Haugh, Public and Government Affairs Manager for AAA Kansas. “Of the animal strikes reported by AAA Insurance policy holders in 2017, the average cost per claim was more than \$4,500.”

The Kansas Highway Patrol cautions drivers to refrain from making exaggerated maneuvers to avoid a deer in the road, lest a bad situation become even worse.

“If you are unfortunate enough to have a deer enter the highway in front of your car, it is best to hit the animal and not swerve to avoid it,” said the KHP’s Lt. Adam Winters. “Often, we find more serious crashes occur when you swerve to miss the deer, potentially losing control of your vehicle, leaving the road or veering into oncoming traffic.”

The agencies recommend the following to help motorists avoid crashes with deer:

- * Be especially watchful at dawn and dusk, when deer are more active.**
- * If you see one deer, watch for others, as they seldom travel alone.**
- * Reduce speed and be alert near wooded areas or green spaces, such as parks and golf courses, and near water sources such as streams and ponds.**
- * Deer crossing signs show areas where high numbers of vehicle/deer crashes have occurred in the past.**
- * Use bright lights when there is no oncoming traffic and scan the road ahead of you to watch for deer.**
- * Don't swerve to avoid hitting a deer—the most serious crashes sometimes occur when motorists swerve and collide with another vehicle or run off the road and hit an obstacle.**
- * Always wear a seat belt and use the appropriately-fitted child safety seats—they are your best defense should you be involved in a crash.**
- * Honk your horn with one long blast. A long blast on your horn may frighten large animals, such as deer, away from your vehicle. The Insurance Information Institute (I.I.I.) advises against relying on devices such as deer whistles and reflectors, which have not been proven to reduce collisions with animals.**

If you do strike a deer, here are some additional tips:

- * Slow down, move your vehicle to the shoulder if possible, and call for law enforcement. KHP dispatch can be reached at *47, Kansas Turnpike at *KTA, and local law enforcement at 911. Make sure you tell the dispatcher if the animal or your vehicle is still in the road.**
- * If you hit a deer or other animal, do not worry about removing the animal. Law enforcement can remove the animal from the road when they arrive. Don't go near a wounded animal. A frightened and wounded animal can be unpredictable.**
- * Turn on your hazard lights and remain buckled up inside your vehicle. You are more protected this way, should a secondary crash occur.**
- * If you must be outside your vehicle, make sure it is as far off the road as possible, and do not stand between your vehicle and another one. Keep children buckled, and in car seats in the vehicle. Be vigilant and watch traffic.**

Anyone involved in a vehicle-deer crash resulting in personal injury or property damage that totals \$1,000 or more is required to immediately report the crash to the nearest law enforcement agency. Failure to report any traffic crash is a misdemeanor and may result in suspension of driving privileges.

A salvage tag is required to remove a deer carcass, or any part of the carcass, from the crash site. Tags can be issued by KHP troopers, sheriff's deputies, or KDWPT game wardens.

Many Signals Communications