

News Article

By: John E. Woodmansee, Extension Educator, Agriculture/Natural Resources

E-mail: jwoodman@purdue.edu Phone: 260-244-7615 Web: www.extension.purdue.edu/whitley

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Purdue Expert Warns to Watch Out for Deer on the Roads

My wife and I have had the unfortunate experience of hitting a deer with our vehicle – twice – right after we had purchased new vehicles. (Why can't they hit our older, junkier vehicles)? One of those deer actually ran into us! Damage is expensive to repair, and it can also be dangerous.

Brian MacGowan, Purdue Extension Wildlife Specialist, recently urged Hoosiers to watch out for deer on the roads.

“Currently, experts estimate about 30 million white-tailed deer throughout its range,” said MacGowan. “There are probably more white-tailed deer in North America today than at the time of European settlement.”

According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, there are approximately one and a half million deer-vehicle collisions in the United States each year, resulting in about 150 deaths and over \$1 billion in vehicle damage. Deer were struck in 3 out of 4 vehicle-animal crashes. Next in line were cattle, horses and dogs. The month with highest risk of collisions with deer is November.

“While deer-vehicle collisions can happen any time of year, October to December is the peak,” said MacGowan. “Most collisions occur from dusk to dawn on high speed rural roads.” In Indiana, if a deer dies following a collision with a motor vehicle, a conservation officer, DNR property manager or other law enforcement officer may issue a permit to an individual to possess the deer.

Many tactics have been tried over the years to reduce collisions. MacGowan said that most of these have proved ineffective or at least need more investigation. “One common approach that does not work is the deer whistle,” he said. “While manufacturers contend that deer can hear the whistles up to a quarter mile away, published studies have not verified their effectiveness or whether or not deer can even hear them.” The lack of deer response to deer whistles may be because deer don't recognize the sounds as threatening or they have too little time to react, MacGowan said.

If you are waiting on the magical answer to avoid all deer collisions, I'm afraid you are going to be disappointed.

“There is no foolproof way to prevent deer-vehicle collisions,” said MacGowan. “Hunting is the most biologically and economically effective method of maintaining Indiana's deer herd at an optimal level – all else being equal, less deer translates to reduced probability of hitting a deer.” He said that fencing

deer from roadways has been proven most effective at reducing accidents at specific locations, but it is very costly to construct and maintain.

MacGowan said there are common-sense precautions all drivers can take to reduce the risk of deer-vehicle collisions. The Insurance Information Institute recommends the following driving tips.

- Be vigilant in early morning and evening hours, the most active time for deer.
- Use your high-beam headlights.
- Slow down and blow your horn with one long blast to frighten the deer away.
- Brake firmly when you notice a deer in or near your path. Do not swerve. It can confuse the deer as to where to run. It can also cause you to lose control and hit a tree or another car.
- Be alert and drive with caution when you are moving through a deer crossing zone.
- Obey posted speed limits and always wear your seatbelt. Most people injured in car/deer crashes were not wearing their seatbelt.
- Look for other deer after one has crossed the road. Deer seldom run alone.

Read MacGowan's original article on Purdue Extension Department of Forestry and Natural Resources' *Got Nature?* blog at: <https://www.purdue.edu/fnr/extension/got-nature-blog/>.