

Motorists Urged to Watch Out for Deer Crossing Roadways

Onset of Peak Deer Activity Calls for Vigilance at Dawn, Dusk and Night

Late October through November is prime time for increased white-tailed deer activity in Delaware, leading up to their peak mating season in mid-November. With more deer crossing roadways in the shorter days ahead, especially after the Nov. 7 change from daylight saving time back to Eastern Standard Time, motorists are urged to be on high alert to avoid collisions with these large animals.

“Bucks are very single-minded in their pursuit of does during the rut, their mating season, which lasts from October to December and peaks from Nov. 10 to 20. If that pursuit takes a buck or doe across a roadway in front of your vehicle, that’s where they’re going to go, whether it’s Route 1 or a rural road,” said Wildlife Program Manager Joe Rogerson with the [Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control](#). “Drivers should pay particular attention on roads bordered by woods or agricultural fields, since deer typically cross between areas of cover, but not always.”

Although deer in roadways are a year-round hazard, national and state statistics indicate the last three months of the year are the most likely time for accidents. In 2020, the Delaware Office of Highway Safety (OHS) reported a rise in collisions between vehicles and deer on Delaware roadways starting in October with 218 crashes. That number peaked in November with a total of 337 crashes, followed by 153 in December.

From September 2020 through February 2021, there were a total of 1,004 crashes throughout the state involving deer. And

along with property damage that comes with a deer collision, 3.7% of those crashes also resulted in a personal injury.

Deer tend to be most active in the early morning and at dusk. According to the latest OHS data, deer-vehicle collisions occur most often between 6 a.m. and 7 a.m. and spike again from 6 p.m. to midnight – including the timeframe when many people are heading home for the evening.

“We know this is the time of year when deer are out along the roadways in higher numbers and we have shorter daylight hours,” said Kimberly Chesser, director of the Delaware Office of Highway Safety. “That means drivers need to be more cautious around dusk and dawn, slow down and use your high-beams when possible to see further ahead and illuminate deer along the road.”

According to Delaware State Police (DSP), more than 1,700 crashes involving animals occurred on Delaware roads in 2020, 74 of which caused personal injuries. No fatalities were reported.

“Deer crashes are more prevalent this time of year and drivers must maintain full attention while driving,” said Master Cpl. Gary Fournier, Delaware State Police. “Deer will dart across any of the roadways on a frequent basis, especially in the fall, but keep in mind they may also cross during the day or in areas where there is ample lighting at night. Be cautious and scan the sides of the roadways as you’re driving. This may not always prevent a deer-related crash, but it can certainly help minimize damage and/or injuries.”

The average white-tailed deer in Delaware weighs about 130 pounds, with larger bucks tipping the scales at 200 pounds or more, according to DNREC’s Division of Fish and Wildlife. Hitting an animal that size can do serious and expensive damage to vehicles. Such a collision may also cause injury to drivers or passengers or trigger an accident involving other

motorists.

To avoid a large out-of-pocket expense, AAA recommends purchasing an auto policy including comprehensive coverage, which covers collisions with deer or other animals. AAA Mid-Atlantic notes the average claim submitted to AAA Insurance for a deer strike is more than \$5,000.

Based on reported insurance claims from July 1, 2020 to June 20, 2021, State Farm Insurance ranked Delaware 27th in the nation, with state motorists having a 1-in-105 chance of being involved in an animal collision. Deer account for the majority of animal-related crashes and vehicle damage claims.

DNREC, OHS, police agencies and auto insurance companies all agree: the best way to prevent or lessen the severity of deer collisions is attentive driving, which includes avoiding distractions that might take a driver's eyes off the road, such as mobile phones, adjusting the radio, eating or passenger activities.

Additional safety tips include:

- Always wear your seatbelt to reduce your risk of injury in a collision.
- Reduce speed at night, on curves and in bad weather.
- Switch to high beams when there is no oncoming traffic to better reflect the eyes of deer on or near the roadway and scan the sides of the road as well as what's directly ahead.
- Watch for "Deer Crossing" signs marking commonly-traveled areas by deer on the road ahead. Slow down immediately and proceed with caution until past the crossing point.
- Deer usually travel in groups, so if you see one deer, there are likely to be others.
- Slow down and blow your horn with one long blast to frighten deer away. Do not rely on devices such as deer

whistles, deer fences and reflectors to deter deer, as these devices have not been proven to reduce deer-vehicle collisions.

- Do not swerve to miss a deer – brake and stay in your lane. Losing control of your vehicle, crossing into another lane, hitting an oncoming vehicle, or leaving the roadway and striking a tree or utility pole will likely be a much more serious outcome than hitting a deer.
- If you hit a deer, and your vehicle is damaged, stop at the scene, get your car off the road if possible, turn on your vehicle hazard lights and if you are injured, call 911.
- Do not touch the animal or get too close; an injured deer may bite or kick and are capable of causing serious injury.

Motorists are reminded that it is unlawful to take possession of a deer that has been struck by an automobile without first obtaining a vehicle-killed deer tag, which can be provided by any law enforcement agency in the state. For more information about deer in Delaware, visit de.gov/deer.

About DNREC

The Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control protects and manages the state's natural resources, protects public health, provides outdoor recreational opportunities and educates Delawareans about the environment. The DNREC [Division of Fish and Wildlife](#) conserves and manages Delaware's fish and wildlife and their habitats, and provides fishing, hunting, wildlife viewing and boating access on nearly 65,000 acres of public land. For more information, visit the [website](#) and connect with @DelawareDNREC on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#).

About Delaware Office of Highway Safety

The Office of Highway Safety (OHS) is committed to improving the safety of Delaware's motoring public by focusing on behavioral traffic safety issues such as impaired driving, seat belt use, speeding, child passenger safety, pedestrian and bicycle safety, motorcycle safety, and teen driving issues.

FAQs can be answered at ArriveAliveDE.com. You can follow the Delaware Office of Highway Safety by visiting us at: ArriveAliveDE.com, [OHS](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Snapchat](#), and [YouTube](#).

About AAA

AAA provides automotive, travel, and insurance services to 60 million members nationwide and more than 148,000 members in Delaware. AAA advocates for the safety and mobility of its members and has been committed to outstanding road service for more than 100 years. AAA is a non-stock, non-profit corporation working on behalf of motorists, who can now map a route, find local gas prices, discover discounts, book a hotel, and track their roadside assistance service with the [AAA Mobile app](#) for iPhone, iPad and Android. For more information, visit www.AAA.com.

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