



Road traffic accidents involving deer

Recent research indicates that over 74,000 deer may be involved in vehicle collisions each year in Britain.

Six species of deer live wild in Britain with a combined population of over one million. Increases in deer numbers and their distribution, combined with a rise in the volume of traffic, are resulting in a large number of road traffic accidents each year. These have significant human costs and are a major animal welfare problem.

It is estimated that several people are killed and over 700 injured every year as a result of accidents involving deer, either through direct collisions or swerving to avoid deer. The cost of damage to vehicles is estimated to be at least £17 million.

Each year over 10,000 deer are severely injured but not killed instantly when hit by vehicles. They may suffer for prolonged periods until someone can attend to humanely dispatch them. Some manage to move away from the roadside but may die later as a result of their injuries.

In England the three most common species involved are fallow (40 per cent), roe (32 per cent) and muntjac (25 per cent). Accidents happen throughout the year but there is a peak during May when young roe bucks are dispersing and another from October through to January associated with the increased movement of fallow, red and sika deer around the rut. The risks increase when rush hours coincide with peaks in deer activity around dawn and dusk.

What is being done?

The first national study has recently been undertaken by the Deer Initiative, a broad partnership of statutory and voluntary organisations (including the RSPCA). Funded by the Highways Agency and other bodies, this study recorded detailed information about deer-related accidents. The information gathered is being used to identify high-risk areas and key factors associated with collisions. Efforts can then be targeted at 'hot-spots'. Trials have been carried out to test the effectiveness of different mitigation measures.

What is the RSPCA doing to help?

The RSPCA receives several thousand calls each year regarding deer accidents and staff attend, or try to arrange for someone else to do so, in order to alleviate suffering. The Society is a major source of information for the collisions project and has so far supplied details of nearly 17,000 incidents. The Society has helped publicise the issue to increase general awareness, with press releases attracting substantial coverage in national and regional news media.

What can you do?

If driving, try to avoid deer collisions by:

- ✓ *Taking note of deer warning signs.*
- ✓ *Keeping your speed down. It's 'forty for a reason' in areas such as the New Forest and Ashdown Forest.*
- ✓ *Taking extra care during the high-risk periods of early morning and early evening.*
- ✓ *Being aware that further deer may cross after the ones you notice.*
- ✓ *Using headlights on high beam if there is no oncoming traffic. This will make deer easier to see by illuminating the eyes of any on the road BUT then dip the beams otherwise they may 'freeze'.*
- ✓ *Report any deer-vehicle collisions to the police.*

Further information

Deer on our Roads - Counting the Cost
<http://www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk/pdf/DeerOnOurRoads%20final.pdf>

National Deer-Vehicle Collisions Project website
<http://www.deercollisions.co.uk/>

To report any injured deer to the RSPCA please ring the 24-hour cruelty and advice line on 0300 1234 999.