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Motorists: Be Aware Of Deer!

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Deer are on the move as autumn progresses, and that includes crossing highways. Drivers can take steps to reduce the chances of deer-vehicle accidents.

Deer encounters near roads increase in late October because the cooler weather makes them more active and there is disturbance in their regular haunts as farmers harvest crops, said Joe DeBold, urban wildlife biologist for the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC). He added that as autumn foliage falls to the ground, deer are prompted to look for new hiding places.

“Then the peak season for deer movement usually occurs around the first three weeks of November during the rut, or breeding season,” DeBold said. “These changes increase the chances that deer may dart in front of moving vehicles.”

He noted that deer are most active during evening, dusk and dawn hours.

“Drivers should be alert, slow down and drive cautiously,” DeBold said, “especially when driving through wooded or rural areas. Keep an eye on the shoulders, ditches and field edges. Often deer can be seen feeding or waiting to cross a road. Sometimes they try to dart across a road as a vehicle approaches. Be especially alert on roadways posted with deer crossing signs.”

Motorists should use high-beam headlights at night when possible for a wider field of vision. “Watch for deer silhouettes or eyes glowing in the headlights,” he advised. “When one deer is spotted, more are often close behind.”

Slowing down is the best defense. If a deer does dart into the road, avoid panic braking or swerving, which can cause accidents.

Rural areas are not the only place where deer-vehicle strikes occur. According to the Missouri State Highway Patrol, in 2010, almost one-third of the traffic crashes involving deer happened in urban areas.

“If a vehicle does strike a deer, the motorist should immediately call 911 and report any injuries and the location of the accident,” DeBold said. “If the deer is still alive, the driver should wait for law enforcement personnel to arrive at the scene.”

He added that any motorist wanting to keep the meat, hide or antlers from a deer killed on the highway must contact a conservation agent in the county where the accident occurred and request a disposition form before taking the deer into possession.

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