



Deer-Vehicle Collision Information Kit

Use Caution to Avoid Deer-Vehicle Collisions

LINCOLN, Neb. – Deer become more active in the fall and because of it, drivers should be more alert than ever when out on the road.

Deer pose a potentially dangerous threat to themselves and the occupants of vehicles traveling Nebraska's highways and country roads, especially during October and November.

As the harvest begins, crop and cover patterns will change quickly and daylight hours will become shorter. As the deer breeding season approaches, deer will have a lot of things to distract them. Deer activity increases and movement peaks each day near dawn and just after dusk.

Here are some things drivers can do to try to avoid deer-vehicle accidents:

- When driving near shelterbelts, woodlots, creeks, or where crops are still standing, especially during evening or early morning, reduce your speed and watch for deer.
- When you spot a deer, assume there will be others in the same area, either ahead of or behind the one you have seen.
- Be prepared to stop suddenly.
- Many places where deer are known to travel are posted with deer crossing signs, but the absence of a sign does not mean a deer will not unexpectedly appear.
- Deer often seem to be disoriented or confused by headlights. Some react by freezing in the light, some dart into the path of the vehicle, others bolt away in the opposite direction. Sometimes deer that have just crossed the road ahead of the vehicle suddenly change direction and run back into the path of a vehicle or collide with it.
- Honk your horn and flash your headlights to frighten deer away from the side of the road. If there is other traffic on the road, you can activate your emergency flashers and tap your brakes to alert other drivers to the potential danger.
- Anticipate the possibility of a deer unexpectedly crossing in front of you and plan ahead to avoid swerving, turning or braking the vehicle too sharply if a deer suddenly appears.

If a deer is struck and the driver wants to salvage it, the driver may possess the deer but must contact a Nebraska Game and Parks Commission conservation officer within 24 hours to obtain a salvage tag.

Tips for Avoiding Deer-Vehicle Collisions

- Be alert for deer at all times, especially during dusk and dawn and especially when driving near shelterbelts, woodlots, creeks, or where crops still are standing.
- Reduce your speed at night and be prepared to stop suddenly.
- If you see one deer, expect to see others.
- Stay on the road and strike the animal; do not swerve or leave the roadway and collide with a roadside object and do not cross the centerline.
- Expect more deer near deer crossing signs because they should be installed where this is true.
- Honk your horn or flash your headlights to frighten the deer away.
- Search and scan the roadway and roadside ahead.
- Keep your windshield clean.
- Buckle your seatbelt.
- Stay sober.
- Keep your headlights properly adjusted.
- Use your high beams where possible.

Avoiding Car-deer Collisions

Defensive driving, seasonal awareness and liberal deer harvest reduce wrecks

By Doug Carroll

The doe seemingly came out of nowhere. One minute there was nothing but darkness and the twin beams of my car's headlights illuminating my side of the four-lane highway. The next minute a ghostly figure was moving from the grassy median, striding purposefully

across the pavement, seemingly oblivious to the heavy metal beast with bright, gleaming eyes hurtling toward it.

My foot was on the brake the instant my brain registered movement from the corner of my eye. Pressing hard enough to cut my speed significantly without locking



ERIC FOWLER

Unpredictable at best, a deer standing alongside the road is a potential hazard that all drivers should pay particular attention to.



DOUG CARROLL

In today's fast-paced society, deer carcasses are a common sight on Nebraska roadsides and illustrate the need for careful driving.

up, I tried to steer around the deer without losing control but I could not swerve in time. My car's front quarter panel smashed into the doe's chest and neck with a loud thud, spinning the animal and sending its rear into the driver's side door.

Coming to a complete stop, I waited for my heart rate to slow and the adrenaline to ebb from my body. The incident happened so fast that my youngest son and daughter, who were riding with me, did not know what had happened. Answering their many questions, I realized how lucky we had been – if I had not been watching, I

might have hit the deer squarely with the front of the car, causing more damage and sending the animal into the windshield. In 25-plus years of driving, most of it in prime deer habitat, this was the first time I had hit a deer. I hope it will be the last. Here are some tips that might help you avoid a similar incident.

Beware at Twilight

First, be very cautious when driving at night, especially at dawn or dusk. Deer are crepuscular, meaning they are most active at twilight. They usually feed in the evening, rest for a while to

chew their cud, then feed again in the early morning hours before moving to their bedding area shortly after sunrise. This means they are often most active in the low-light hours when people are heading to or from work, school or other activities.

Second, be very alert when traveling through deer territory – which is most of Nebraska. The population is more dense in some areas, such as along riverbottoms and near eastern Nebraska farm fields, but deer can be found anywhere, at any time – even in cities. Last winter I saw two deer feeding along the railroad tracks just a block

from downtown Lincoln. While I was alert to deer the night that I hit the doe, I probably had a false sense of security because I was not traveling through a river or creek drainage.

There was, however, a small finger of trees bisecting two cornfields next to the highway, and that leads to another tip: Deer often travel along drainages and treelines as they move from one area to another. They are also creatures of habit and use the same travel corridors year after year. The places where these corridors cross heavily traveled roads are often marked with deer crossing signs. Don't ignore them – they are



not placed arbitrarily. Of course, an absence of signs doesn't mean an area is safe – deer can't read. Pay special attention to any place where you've seen deer in the past, whether they were dead or alive. One thing I did right on the night I hit the deer was that I was

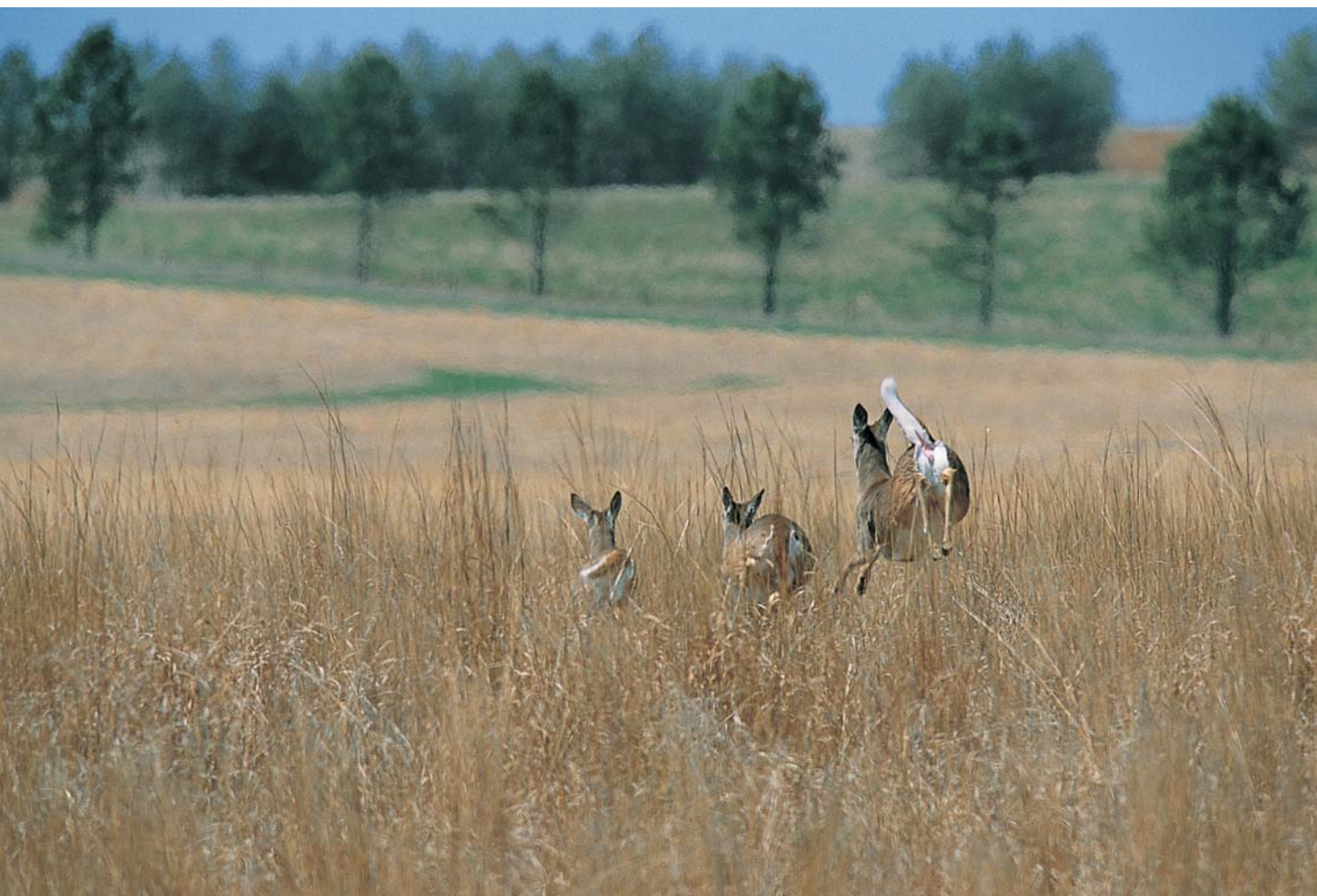
watching the edge of the road ahead. Watch the sides of the road and slow down if you see a deer or its eyeshine near the road. Deer are unpredictable. If you see a deer and it seems to be looking at your car and waiting for you to pass, be prepared to stop if the deer suddenly starts to cross the road. Even if a deer crosses safely in front of your vehicle, slow down. Deer often travel in small groups and others might be following. Or the deer that just crossed the road might reverse course and recross it.

Avoid Extreme Maneuvers

Another thing I did right was I did not take extreme evasive action. Drivers sometimes make a bad situation worse by veering into oncoming traffic or hitting a fixed object such as a pole

while trying to avoid a deer. If you cannot stop in time to avoid a crash, brake until the last fraction of a second before impact, then let off your brakes. This will cause the front end of your vehicle to rise, increasing the odds that the deer will pass beneath the car or truck instead of being launched into your windshield. My youngsters and I were buckled up, which made us law-abiding and, more important, a lot safer. The odds of surviving a collision without serious injury or death are two to three times greater for people wearing seat belts.

A deer can appear in front of your car at any time of year, but most deer/vehicle collisions occur in autumn. When the fall crop harvest begins, deer's summer feeding and bedding patterns change and they move more often. Daylight grows shorter in the



Social by nature, deer seldom travel alone. If you see one deer crossing the road, expect others to be with it.

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By increasing the doe harvest in parts of the state, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission has reduced the deer population where crop depredation complaints and deer-vehicle accidents are high.

fall, meaning more people are traveling at dawn and dusk when deer are most active. Deer also do more running around during their fall breeding season. It's no wonder the collision count goes up during autumn.

Collisions Are Costly

The average number of deer/vehicle accidents reported in Nebraska from 2000 through 2004 was almost 3,740, peaking at 3,951 in 2003. These numbers come from the Highway Safety – Traffic Engineering Division of the Nebraska Department of Roads, but they only include those accidents that were investigated and reported by local law enforcement personnel. Many more collisions occur that are not reported or investigated.

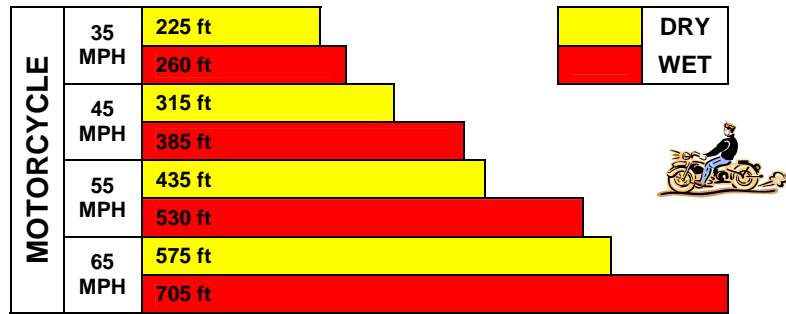
The number of deer-vehicle collision reports dropped significantly in 2004, which might indicate the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's liberalized antlerless harvest over the past few years is beginning to reduce deer populations in some parts of the state. Deer-vehicle collision reports and crop depredation complaints are the major reasons why the Commission tries to reduce deer populations in some areas. Wildlife managers have made special efforts to reduce the population where complaints and accidents have been high in recent years, especially in southeastern Nebraska.

While the chance of hitting a deer is low, drivers should consider the possibility every time they get behind the wheel. More than 150 people are killed

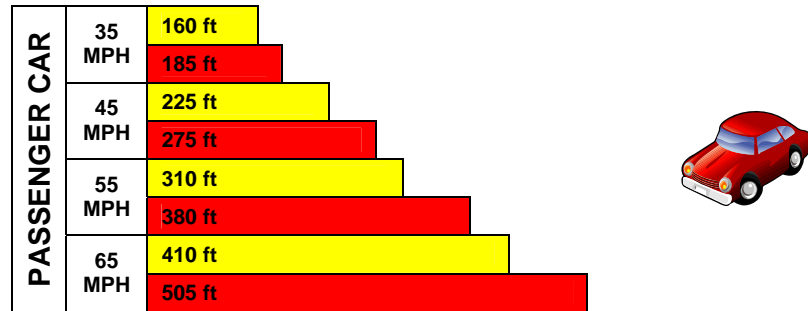
and 29,000 injured annually in animal-vehicle collisions nationwide. Hitting a deer can be expensive too. According to the Insurance Information Institute, a national organization that provides information about the insurance industry, the average minimum cost for repairing a vehicle after a collision with a deer is \$2,000. A federal General Accounting Office report states that deer-automobile accidents result in more than \$1 billion in property damage annually.

While at one time deer were uncommon in Nebraska, there are now approximately 300,000 deer in the state each fall. Many deer will rarely, if ever, cross a road, but enough do so on a regular enough basis that it makes sense to keep an eye out for them. Doing so will save lives and money. ■

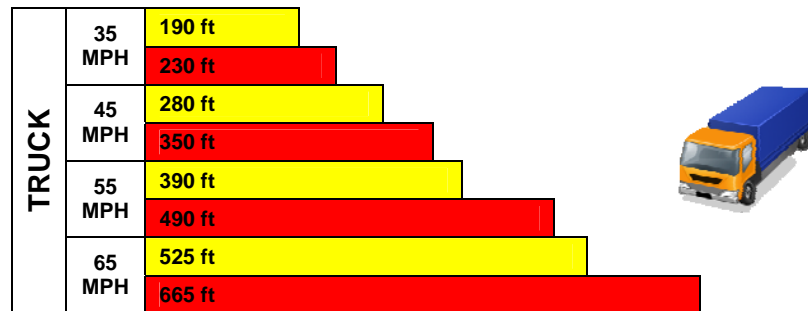
SPEED & STOPPING DISTANCES



100 ft	200 ft	300 ft	400 ft	500 ft	600 ft
1 Football Field 100 yds			2 Football Fields 200 yds		



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SPEED & STOPPING DISTANCES

Drivers who exceed the posted speed limit or drive too fast for conditions increase the length of time and distance necessary to stop their vehicles. The faster a vehicle is moving, the greater distance it will travel while the driver reacts to a situation. It is important for drivers to adjust their driving behavior to adapt to road and weather conditions.

The estimated distances which could be needed by a typical driver to stop a motorcycle, automobile, and tractor/trailer are shown on the opposite side of this piece. These estimated distances are shown in feet and a football field is used as a common reference point.

Note that the estimated distances are based on distances required by Federal regulations or based on those assumed for roadway design purposes by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials.

Provided by:
 U.S. Department of Transportation
 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration