

It's the most dangerous time of year for deer-car crashes in N.J.

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The windshield of this SUV was shattered after getting hit by a deer on Route 9 in Howell on Nov. 12, 2018. Police praised the driver for avoiding a potentially worse crash. Close to 5,300 deer-vehicle collisions happened that year, prompting experts to urge caution and use of defensive driving skills to avoid a crash.

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By [Larry Higgs | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com](#)

Deer are entering mating season this month. Sweet, but danger lurks for those four-legged creatures who want to [“swipe right”](#) to meet a desired mate on the other side of the road -- in the form of your car. Deer are [more likely to collide with your car](#) now than at any other time of the year, experts said.

That can lead to a nasty crash and in the worst case, injury or death. And the [coronavirus](#) isn't likely to change that, said Kathleen Kerwin, program associate in Rutgers University Wildlife Conservation and Management.

“It seems like [traffic volume is getting back to pre-pandemic levels](#),” she said. “When it comes to deer, whether there are more or less cars on the road, won't affect their behavior. They're only focused on mating, they'll dart in the road due to the hormones.”

And that means a greater chance for a deer-vehicle collision during October and November.

“October-November are when they are the most active. Most wildlife accidents occur during these months,” Kerwin said.

New Jersey saw 5,271 crashes from October-December 2018, equivalent to one deer crash every 25 minutes, said Robert Sinclair, AAA Northeast spokesman, citing the most recent data available. One fatal crash in 2018 was blamed on an animal-vehicle collision, according to State Police statistics.

[A woman was injured in a bizarre collision](#) on Route 9 on Nov. 12, 2018 when a deer was hit by another vehicle and propelled through the windshield of her oncoming SUV in Howell. Covered in glass, she managed to pull off the road and stop. The deer landed in the backseat.

The top six New Jersey counties for deer-vehicle collisions from October-December 2018 were: Monmouth with 572 crashes; Burlington at 538 collisions; Somerset, 406 incidents; Middlesex, 396 collisions; Ocean, 392 incidents; and Morris with 356 crashes, Sinclair said. That was most recent data available.

A comparison with crash data from AAA MidAtlantic showed an increase in collisions from the same time period in 2016 in Monmouth, Burlington, Somerset and Morris counties.

Mating deer are most active at dawn and dusk, which is a problem now that sundown is closer to commuting times, Kerwin said.

“Crashes are most common from 5–7 p.m., during the evening rush hours and when darkness has just set in,” said Tracy Noble, a AAA MidAtlantic spokeswoman. “According to a AAA analysis of New Jersey crash data, October, November, and December are by far the peak months for deer crashes in the Garden State.”

During the October-December 2018 deer mating season, 77% of deer crashes occurred outside daylight hours, according to AAA.

Drivers in suburban towns are at risk as much as motorists in rural places, Kerwin said.

“Deer do very well in suburbia, (especially) small patches of forest (between neighborhoods),” Kerwin said. “ They are happy eating landscaping. Everyone should be on guard.”

Deer in the suburbs also don’t have the same “hunting pressure” that their rural cousins do, since there are restrictions on hunting around occupied dwellings, she said.

“The deer populations are very high compared to historical levels,” Kerwin said. “They used to have wolves and cougars (as predators) now, it’s cars and hunters.”

Of the 1,910 fatal collisions in the United States with animals in a 10-year period, New Jersey had a total of 19 deaths due to vehicle and wildlife collisions between 2009 and 2018, said a study by the [Insurance Institute for Highway Safety](#). Neighboring Pennsylvania had more, at 103 deaths during the same time period and Texas had the most in the country with 201 fatalities.

“The biggest offenders are definitely deer; 90% of the wildlife collisions involve deer,” Kerwin said.

The best defense is to be alert for deer and use defensive driving techniques.

“New Jersey drivers need to buck up this fall and watch for deer,” Noble said. “There are actions you can take to help prevent a crash or reduce the damage from an animal collision.”

Drivers need to watch for deer and should use their high beam headlights, if there is no oncoming traffic, to spot deer on the side of the road. Reducing speed can buy a little more reaction time, experts said.

“A long blast on your horn may frighten animals away from your vehicle,” Noble said.

Drivers should not attempt to swerve around a deer that’s run in front of your vehicle to avoid a collision, both said. While 66% of fatal wildlife collisions are due to hitting the animal, the remainder happen when a vehicle hits something else after swerving to avoid the animal, such as another car or an object off the road such as a tree, or guard rail, the IIHS study said.

There are tactics to minimize collision damage and the possibility of the deer riding up over the hood and into the vehicle’s interior.