

Be on the lookout this fall: Deer-vehicle collisions increase during breeding season

September 28 2015, by Sandi Martin



Deer and drivers keep a close eye on each other on a road at Red Top Mountain State Park. Deer move around more during mating season, and a UGA study shows that is when motorists are more likely to hit one. Credit: Charlie Killmaster/Georgia Department of Natural Resources

Fall is prime breeding season for deer across Georgia. It's also when drivers are more likely to hit deer that run into the road, according to a new study from the University of Georgia.

UGA researchers have completed a county-by-county analysis of when motorists should be more aware of possibly hitting a [deer](#). They looked at breeding data and then compared it to deer-vehicle collision statistics across Georgia.

According to the study, between 2005 and 2012, there were 45,811 reported deer-vehicle collisions across all Georgia counties.

Deer-vehicle collisions increase during "rutting season" because white-tailed deer move around a lot more looking for mates, according to James Stickles, lead researcher on the project. Stickles, who led the study while earning his master's degree from UGA's Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, said researchers were able to create a map that more accurately reflects when motorists are in greater danger of hitting a deer. The new map lists specific peak dates for each of Georgia's 159 counties.

"Now we can warn drivers in a more relevant timeframe than in the past," said Stickles, who is now assistant deer coordinator for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

"Depending on your location in Georgia, peak rut may occur anywhere from October to December," he said. "By knowing deer movement dates in specific areas, email blasts and other warnings to be more vigilant of deer can be distributed before, and during, times when deer-vehicle collisions are most likely to occur."

For example, the peak time when deer are on the move in Clarke County, where UGA is located, is Nov. 10-16.

Recently published in the *Journal of the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies*, the study analyzed deer-vehicle collisions from 2005 to 2012 and then compared the timing of those wrecks with available conception data, deer movement information obtained from deer wearing GPS collars in Harris County and the old "rut map" from Georgia Outdoor News. The project was funded by the Georgia Department of Transportation.

DANGER ON THE ROAD

MATING SEASON BREEDS WRECKS

White-tailed deer cause an estimated **1 million+** crashes, **29,000 injuries** and up to **200 deaths** every year in the United States. Collisions with deer cost **\$4.6 billion** in vehicle damage and medical bills.⁽¹⁾



In Georgia, you have a

1 in 134

chance of hitting a deer with your car.

Georgia is **21st** in the rankings of deer-car crashes.⁽¹⁾



In Georgia, deer are behind an estimated **50,000** wrecks each year — making up nearly **14 percent** of all vehicle collisions in the state.⁽²⁾

BUT!

drivers report only **1/4** of them:

12,166

collisions with deer on Georgia roads in 2010.⁽²⁾



October and November had the highest numbers of vehicle collisions with deer across the state — both peak deer breeding months.⁽²⁾

Deer mating season is called the **"rut season."** Deer move around a lot more during mating season, especially bucks.⁽³⁾



UGA researchers analyzed the 45,811 reported deer-vehicle collisions from 2005 to 2011 to find out when motorists were more likely to hit a deer in the road. They created a map that tells motorists when this greater danger exists. **You are more likely to hit a deer between dusk and dawn.**⁽³⁾

georgiawildlife.com/rut-map

White-tailed bucks can weigh more than **200 pounds**, while does can weigh upwards of **100 pounds** depending on location.⁽³⁾



Burke County

Burke County had **246** reported deer-vehicle collisions in 2011, the highest in Georgia.⁽²⁾

(1) State Farm (2) Georgia Department of Transportation (3) UGA Deer Lab
Graphic by Wade Newbury/University of Georgia

This graphic gives a visual overview of deer mating season and the car collisions that can occur during it. Credit: Wade Newbury/University of Georgia

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources is already using the new map created by UGA to inform hunters of peak rut dates. The Georgia DOT is also considering using the map to develop specific motorist warnings for each region.

There are things motorists should do to avoid hitting a deer, said Bob Warren, a professor in the Warnell School and one of the researchers on the study.

Deer are mostly active from dusk to dawn, Warren said, so that's when the risk of a deer-vehicle collision is greater.

"Any motorist driving at night needs to be especially cautious because deer will be more active during nighttime periods," he said. "This is why most deer-vehicle collisions occur early in the morning or late in the evening, because that's when deer and motorists are both most active."

Warren said that when he drives at night, he's diligent about driving at a cautious speed and scanning both sides of the road because a deer can come from either direction. But he also warned that typically, it's not the first deer that's the problem.

"Deer are rarely alone," he said. "If a motorist sees one deer, look for the second one. In many instances, it's the second deer that crosses the road that gets hit."

More information: The map can be found online and downloaded at the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' website, www.georgiawildlife.com/rut-map .

"Using Deer-vehicle Collisions to Map White-Tailed Deer Breeding Activity in Georgia" can be found online at www.seafwa.org/html/journals/pdf/30%20Stickles%20et%20al%20202-207.pdf .

Provided by University of Georgia

Citation: Be on the lookout this fall: Deer-vehicle collisions increase during breeding season (2015, September 28) retrieved 12 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-09-lookout-fall-deer-vehicle-collisions-season.html>

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