

In the News

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Collisions rising, deer study finds

In November, 2010, State Farm Insurance released its annual Deer Hit Study (State Farm 2010). The average likelihood of a vehicle striking a deer, moose, or elk within the next 12 months is 1 in 183 nationally. However, the likelihood of a vehicle striking a deer varies greatly, depending upon the state (Figure 1). Drivers in West Virginia for the fourth year in a row have the greatest risk of striking a deer (1 in 42), according to the study. Iowa, Michigan, South Dakota, and Montana round out the remaining top 5 states (in descending order) that have the highest risk for drivers of striking a deer. There has been a 21% increase in deer–vehicle collisions (DVCs) over the past 5 years, even though the number of miles traveled by U.S. drivers has increased by only 2%. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, DVCs in the United States are responsible for about 200 fatalities each year. There has also been a 1.7% increase in the cost of repairs to vehicles that struck deer over the past year, with repairs averaging \$3,103 per vehicle.

Panther ahead: warning system to alert drivers

Collision with vehicles ranks as the greatest threat to the endangered Florida panther, according to the *National Parks Traveler* (December 2010). In early December, 2 young panthers were killed in collisions with cars, bringing the total number of panthers killed by cars in Florida to 15 for the year. To mitigate the problem, Florida plans to install a monitoring system that will alert drivers that they are approaching a panther. Florida officials will be seeking designs for a Roadside Animal Detection System that will warn oncoming drivers whenever a panther is on the highway.

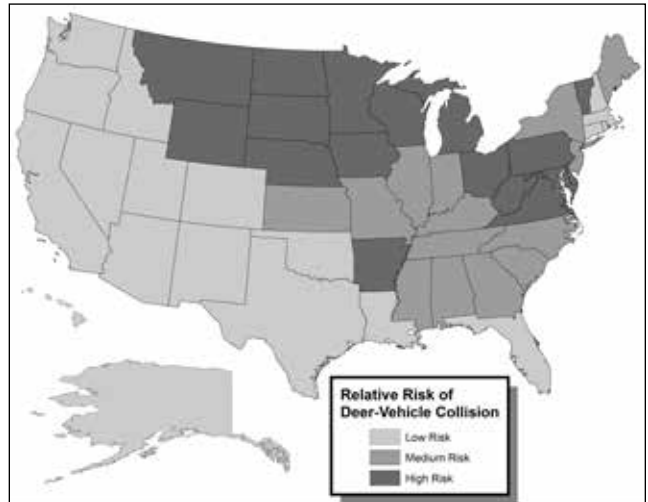


Figure 1. Map of relative risk of a vehicle colliding with a deer, moose, or elk throughout the United States. States with the greatest risk of a vehicle striking a deer are indicated in dark gray (State Farm Insurance, 2010, <http://www.statefarm.com/aboutus/_pressreleases/2010/deer-vehicle-collision-frequency.asp>).

According to Marcel Huijser, a research ecologist at Montana State University, collisions have in some cases dropped 97% when this type of system is used. The system will be installed in the southwestern corner of Big Cypress National Preserve, Florida. Wildlife officials believe that reducing panther–vehicle collisions in the area could have a significant positive effect on the panther population.

Feral hogs becoming urbanized

Feral hogs are a nuisance throughout a large portion of the United States. They damage cornfields, pastures, wildlife habitat, and, now, the lawns of suburbanites. Most reports of feral hog damage are from rural areas, often where feral hogs have been introduced for hunting. As their populations expand, the hogs inevitably will begin causing problems for homeowners in suburban areas, according to an article in the *Wall Street Journal* (December 4, 2010). In Texas, feral hogs are moving into the suburbs of Dallas–Fort Worth. In wide-open, rural areas, such as much of Texas, large-scale trapping, traditional



Figure 2. Two small feral hogs in a corral trap in southern Indiana. (Photo courtesy U.S. Department of Agriculture)

hunting, and aerial hunting can be effective at removing localized populations (Figure 2). The state of Texas encouraged feral swine control by declaring October “Hog Out Month” and by holding a “Get the Hogs Out of Texas” contest that will award a \$25,000 grant to the county that removed the highest number of hogs by the end of the month (Texas Department of Agriculture, news release, October 4, 2010). However, the hog problem is not unique to Texas.

In Panama City, Florida, feral hogs have been hanging around the yacht club. NBC’s Today Show (January 7, 2010) reported that feral hogs are terrorizing neighborhoods and causing property damage in Florida. However, residents became so enamored by the hogs that residents disabled the traps that animal-control officers set to remove the critters.

Damage from feral hogs in urban areas is not limited to areas with a large population of hogs. In Detroit, Michigan, escaped hogs from boar-hunting refuges have been turning up in the outskirts of the city. As hog populations continue to expand throughout the United States, problems with urban hogs are expected to increase.

Mountain goat fatally attacks hiker

Although attacks by mountain goats are rare and considered highly unusual, they are not unheard of. The *Discovery Press* (October 18, 2010) reported a mountain goat attack that left a hiker dead in Olympic National Park (ONP) in Washington State. Robert Boardman was hiking in ONP when he encountered a mountain

goat. He tried to shoo the ram away, when it attacked and gored him in the thigh. Boardman was airlifted to the hospital where he was pronounced dead. Park officials shot the animal after they observed blood on its horns. The goat that attacked Boardman was submitted for necropsy (ONP news release, October 28, 2010). No evidence of rabies virus, encephalitis virus, plague, and tularemia was found. According to the pathologist, the ram appeared to be in rut at the time of the attack.

More moose loose in New England

The *Litchfield Country Times* (December 9, 2010) reported that moose (*Alces alces*) sightings are on the rise in Connecticut. Free-ranging moose populations have not been present in Connecticut



Figure 3. Moose sightings are on the rise in New England. (Photo, Laurie Paulik, courtesy USDA/APHIS/Wildlife Services’ National Wildlife Research Center)

since at least 1935. But from 1992 to 2002, there were a total of 106 moose sightings reported in 45 Connecticut towns (Figure 3). Since April 2010, moose have been sighted in a number of towns in eastern Connecticut. The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is warning motorists to use additional caution because several moose have been sighted or killed near roadways. During the fall, a 227-kg and 318-kg moose were killed in Goshen and Barkhamsted, respectively, in vehicle–moose collisions. Since 1995, the DEP has documented 22 moose–vehicle collisions in the state. Luckily, there have been no human fatalities during these collisions. Each year, Maine and New Hampshire typically experience 3 and 1 human deaths, respectively, due to moose–vehicle collisions.

Information from In the News can be cited as:
Caudell, J. N. 2011. In the news. *Human–Wildlife Interactions* 5:3–4.