

BEWARE OF DEER CROSSING (AND PRONGHORN TOO)

The combination of a growing deer population and increased urban sprawl has resulted in an increase in the number of collisions between cars and deer. According to the National Institute for Highway Safety, there are 1.5 million such collisions each year, killing some 150 people, injuring many others, and costing millions of dollars in property damage.

WYOMING

According to State Farm Insurance, Wyoming is a high risk state for the possibility of hitting a deer. In 2011-2012, the number of deer-vehicle collisions was estimated at 3,716. This is a much lower number than most other states, but Wyoming also has fewer licensed drivers than most other states. Still, State Farm estimates the odds are that 1-in-113 drivers is likely to have a collision with a deer in Wyoming. West Virginia topped the list with 1-in-40 odds due to its high population. Wyoming's numbers have dropped slightly in recent years – we were in the top 10 in 2011, but dropped to 13th in 2012.

HERD HABITS

Know where the deer are in your area. How do you find out? One simple way is to pay attention to the “Deer Crossing” signs along the roads. (I once heard someone ask, “How do they make sure that the deer cross only at those crossings? They are wild animals, after all.”) I laughed. It works the other way around, of course. The signs are placed in areas where deer are already known to have active crossing habits. If possible, avoid these areas at dusk and dawn, when deer are most active.

Deer travel in groups, so if you see one, look for others nearby. Keep a lookout for very young animals, especially as the weather warms up in the Spring. But, the most likely times of the year to encounter a deer are in October, November and December – mating season. When driving in areas frequented by deer, keep your speed down so that you can see and react to them much better. When you can, use your high beams to illuminate the road and the shoulder.

BRAKE, DON'T SWERVE

If hitting a deer is unavoidable, brake to slow down as much as possible before the

collision. Swerving can result in your vehicle going off the road, or into another lane of traffic. It is hard to do, but don't make the situation worse by colliding with other people while trying to avoid hitting animals.

ENJOY THE SCENERY

Wyoming has an abundance of wildlife, and it is one of only a few states in America where pronghorn are prevalent. Don't take for granted that you can see herds of pronghorn along the highway as you drive around our wide-open spaces. It is a privilege, but it also requires that we proceed a little more cautiously.

Nothing in this article should be construed as legal advice. You must consult with an attorney for the application of the law to your specific circumstances.

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