

Fact or Fiction? Bambi and her Parents are Surprising Killers



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at closer to 500 because often motorists swerve to avoid deer and are instead killed by collisions with trees or posts. In all, about 1.9 million people have car-vs-deer accidents each year, and 40,000 people are injured in them."¹

If someone had asked you "What is the most dangerous creature you might encounter in the U.S.?" what would you answer? Without reading the title of this piece or the first paragraph, would you have guessed

table are deer-related deaths. As already U.S., it is substantial 300 deaths a year. Langley and Morro from 1979 through were 1,882 animal in the United State animals caused 71 non-venomous an 1,164 deaths, resu annual average of Center for Disease

arks? Snakes? 's comments ate, "Media / misinforms, tion from Table 1 lists the reatures in the human mortality. itoes far exceed r, many of the cur in third-world missing from the ted automobile

Prevention reports that each year, 800,000 Americans seek medical attention for dog bites and 386,000 require treatment in an emergency department and about sixteen die.⁴

Clearly, the human toll makes deer deadlier than snakes, dogs, sharks, bees, alligators, bears, wolves, and a lot of other critters combined.

Table 1
World's most dangerous animals*

| | |
|-----------------|-----------|
| 1. Mosquito | 2 million |
| 2. Snake | 100,000 |
| 3. Scorpion | 5,000 |
| 4. Crocodile | 2,000 |
| 5. Elephant | 600 |
| 6. Bee | 400 |
| 7. Lion | 250 |
| 8. Hippopotamus | 200 |
| 9. Jellyfish | 100 |
| 10. Bears | 5 - 10 |

* http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/top10lists/World's_Most_Dangerous_Animals; accessed July 7, 2010.

John Berlau notes, "Deer is a word that can be singular or plural, and right now deer are very plural. Today's U.S. deer population has rebounded to equal the herd roaming the country when the Pilgrims first dropped anchor in the 1600s. Around the turn of the century, there were only about five hundred thousand whitetail deer in the United States. Today, there are now more than thirty million whitetails."⁵

Car crashes involving deer cause an estimated \$1.1 billion in vehicle damages and most people involved in auto insurance will say the figures are much higher. While the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) keeps annual figures for car-deer accidents, the figures lack a measure of exactness and certainty, because there currently is no standardization in the reporting of deer-related accidents throughout the country, and because what constitutes a "reportable accident" varies so much between states. Also, with a portion of drivers on the road uninsured, unlicensed or driving under the influence, many more deer collisions probably go unreported, notes Bengt Halvorson.⁶

Christine Dugas adds, "Many folks find that their auto insurance does not cover damage to their vehicle. Only comprehensive insurance pays up in such crashes. And nationally, 36 million auto owners don't

have comprehensive insurance. Many drivers drop comprehensive coverage because they decide their vehicles are too old or worth too little to justify the cost."⁷

Which are the worst states for deer-auto collisions per vehicle?

| | |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| West Virginia | 1 in 39 |
| Michigan | 1 in 78 |
| Pennsylvania | 1 in 94 |
| Iowa | 1 in 104 |
| Montana | 1 in 104 ⁸ |

Damage to agriculture

Deer damage to agriculture in New York was between \$58 million and \$60 million in 2003, says Paul Curtis, of Cornell University. In pre-European settlement times, the deer population density was 10 to 15 deer per square mile. Now, in places like southern New York and northern Pennsylvania, there are 30 to 35 deer per square mile. Michael Conover, a wildlife professor and director of the Jack Berryman Institute at Utah State University, estimates deer cause at least \$750 million in damage to the United States timber industry annually.⁹ Deer, of course, can also devastate gardens and landscaping in parks.

One item that serves as a good illustration comparing road accidents and environmental issues relates to deer in Georgia. Deer numbers in this state have increased from 12,000 in 1937 to

more than one million in 2000.

R. Harold Brown observes, "It is a rather strange coincidence that more injury and death occur in Georgia from car collisions with a deer, a prominent symbol of the improved environment, than from two of the most widely studied pollutants, nitrate in drinking water and mercury in fish (I could find no records of injury or death from either pollutant in Georgia.)."¹⁰

What to do

Number one above all else is - slow down. Often drivers are at fault for driving too fast in wildlife areas. Meanwhile, if a deer jumps in front of you, experts say don't swerve suddenly because you can easily lose control. Hitting the deer with your car is quite often a better solution than having somebody killed or seriously injured in your vehicle. In fact, the state of Michigan bluntly tells drivers, "Don't Veer for Deer."¹¹

According to some research, the only measurable change in driver habits (and a reduction in deer collisions) was from the use of temporary flashing "hazard" signs on a section of roadway crossing a deer-migration route. It slowed drivers by about eight miles per hour and showed a promising 50 to 70 percent drop in deer collisions versus on that same stretch of roadway the previous few years.⁶

Keeping the deer off the roadway

<http://download.journals.elsevierhealth.com/pdfs/journals/1080-6032/PIIS108060329770944X.pdf>

http://www.thecarconnection.com/tips-article/1005446_deer-vs-car-no-winners-here

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6835501/>

<http://www.ksl.com/?sid=2222267&nid=148>

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