

Drivers urged to be watchful of seasonal wildlife migration

February 4, 2023



The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) documents an average of more than 6,000 vehicle collisions with deer and elk each year. The actual number of collisions is likely higher, as many are not reported if there is minimal damage or no human injuries.

The encounters frequently lead to damaged vehicles triggering expensive repair costs, and often the collisions can cause human injuries and even death. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety reports 24 people in Oregon died in vehicle collisions with animals between 2011 and 2020.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and ODOT are urging Oregonians to Watch out for Wildlife this time of year and follow these tips:

- Be careful when driving in areas that have special signs indicating the possible presence of wildlife. These signs are posted for a reason.

- Be alert in areas with dense vegetation along the road or while going around curves. Wildlife near the road may not be visible.
- If you see one animal, stay alert. There may be others nearby.
- If you see wildlife on or near the road, slow down and stay in your lane. Many serious crashes are the result of drivers losing control as they swerve to avoid wildlife.

The same advice applies for smaller wildlife like raccoons; try to stay in your lane and do not swerve for these animals. They are less dangerous to vehicles than big game animals and maintaining control of your vehicle is most important.

- Always wear your seat belt. Even a minor collision could result in serious injuries.

ODFW, ODOT and partner organizations are working to reduce the risk of vehicle-wildlife collisions by building wildlife crossings. The crossings allow wildlife to safely follow their migration patterns over or under a road. Data shows wildlife crossings on Hwy 97 near Sunriver have reduced vehicle-wildlife collisions by nearly 90 percent.

The bipartisan infrastructure bill passed by Congress in 2021 is providing \$350 million in competitive grants to the states for wildlife crossings and other mitigation. ODFW, ODOT and other partners will be working to secure grants for projects.

Oregon drivers can also show their support by purchasing a Watch for Wildlife license plate. The revenue generated from license plate sales will benefit projects that help wildlife move within their range and between habitat patches. Originally developed by the Oregon Wildlife Foundation, the license plate is now available at the DMV.

The Central Oregon Coast is experiencing its seasonal cold weather. Although the weather slows down our daily commute, we are not nearly as affected as wildlife, specifically elk and deer.

Natural food sources are lean in the upper elevations in the coast range during the winter as snow falls, covering the ground. This time of year with snow accumulation in the coast range and freezing temperatures periodically down to sea level, elk and deer may move to even lower elevations to find adequate food.

These additional movements often mean that the animals are crossing major roads both day and night which creates hazards to motorists. The Lincoln County Sheriff's Office would like motorists and spectators to be mindful of the animal movements. If you see one deer cross in front of you, chances are there is another one behind.

Please take into account that the animals are often stressed due to additional migration in search of food. When spectating please keep a minimum distance of 100 yards from wildlife. If the animals begin to move from your presence, don't follow them. Oregon Revised Statute 498.006 does protect the chasing or harassing of wildlife.

For more information and tips, visit www.lincolncountysheriff.net

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