

Living With Wildlife- Deer-Vehicle Collisions



submitted photo

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Fall brings about changes in patterns of behaviour and movement in all wildlife. It is these changes and Ottawa's privileged location that causes the majority of deer-vehicle collisions each year.

The Greenbelt and other natural areas that are in close proximity to the Greenbelt such as the South March Highlands are home to White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*). With roads now adjacent or transecting these natural areas, it is no surprise that Ottawa was known as the "deer-vehicle collision capital of Ontario".

Deer-vehicle collisions are higher during the fall months. Deer are more mobile due to the breeding season, known as the rut, which commences in mid-October and continues until late December. Also, during

this time, deer move to their winter feeding grounds and hunting also plays a role in increased movement.

Deer are on the move in the fall in the early morning hours or from dusk to late at night. On a road I travel daily, I have observed deer for many years retreat to the no hunting side of the road in early morning and return to the hunting side come nightfall and safety.

I have a neighbour who is convinced we have smart deer on our road as she has observed them looking in both directions before crossing. This should come as no surprise though given that survival for wildlife depends on adapting to changing circumstances.

The public is doing its part too. The City of Ottawa launched the 'Speeding Costs You Deerly Campaign' in 2006 as part of its Integrated Road Safety Program. The campaign educates drivers about the importance of reducing speed, being alert, staying in control and under-

standing deer traffic patterns as ways to reduce the number of collisions.

"Public service announcements in the media and flashing road signs that are moved frequently along high-risk highways ensure people do not become complacent," says Jerry Thomas, co-ordinator of the Speeding Costs You Deerly Campaign.

This award-winning campaign has reduced deer-vehicle collisions in Ottawa by an amazing 38 per cent during the last four-year fall period, resulting in an estimated social cost savings of \$1.1 million. Even though deer population numbers have been down for several years, this campaign represents a considerable accomplishment given the increased traffic on our roads.

Remember, slow down and be extra cautious where deer are known to cross. If you see a deer crossing ahead, watch for others to follow. For information on deer and other wildlife see www.wildlifeinfo.ca.