



WATCH

If there's one, there's likely more



REFLECT

Look for signs along the road



HONK

A loud blast can scare deer

Who Killed Bambi?

According to the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT), statewide there are about 7,000 collisions a year with deer and elk, causing \$44 million in damages and injuring more than 700 people. An average of two people die per year in these collisions.

Here in Lane County, according to county spokesperson Devon Ashbridge and Becky Taylor, senior transportation planner, there were 79 reported vehicle-animal collisions.

Ashbridge says most of them were in November and during the early morning, 5 to 7 am, and at twilight after 4:30 pm, in clear and dry conditions. Marcola Road had the most hits with 12, and three other roads had four collisions each: Jasper-Lowell Road, Row River Road in Cottage Grove and 30th Avenue in Eugene.

Taylor says, based on the carcasses removed from county roads, the number of animal strikes is probably 500 times the reported figures. Roadkill is reported to the Department of Motor Vehicles if someone is injured (aside from the animal) or the damage exceeds \$2,500.

So the bad news is hitting a deer or elk is bad for you, bad for the animal and bad for your vehicle.

The only good news is now you can eat the deer — if you are up for it after it's just bounced off your car. If it

was an elk, it's highly doubtful you or your vehicle will be up for butchering and transporting the 700 lb animal after running into it.

So many deer meet your bumper in November for two main reasons. One of them is the time change making the commute darker in the evenings; the other is because the bucks are running around distracted by lust. They are in rut.

Right around the time you are thinking about the holidays and about driving to grandma's house for Thanksgiving, Bambi and his buddies are thinking about making cute little deer babies.

Cidney Bowman, wildlife passage coordinator with ODOT puts it a little more delicately, saying the males in rut are "not paying as much attention." And because rut means the deer are on the move and because deer are crepuscular — most active at dawn and dusk — this means they are also most likely to be in the road and make contact with your car in the darkness of autumn.

On a map of wildlife collisions in Oregon, the Eugene area doesn't look too bad. This area looks nothing like spots outside Roseburg, Klamath Falls and Bend, which averaged more than 11 collisions per mile per year. Lane County is more in the two-to-four range.

But that doesn't mean that roadways aren't a problem for deer and elk. Bowman points out that I-5 north of Eugene shows up as having no problems at all. That's because "traffic becomes a barrier," she says, with cars bumper-to-bumper acting like a wall, and cutting off the animals' habitat.

"Most of the data is around deer and elk," Bowman says of animals and roadways. "But it impacts all species."

Hitting a deer or elk is costly on a number of levels, and the impacts on animals can also be environmentally costly. There's a loss of hunting revenues, the cost to the state for maintenance crews, the repair and medical bills and finally "the intrinsic value of wildlife."

People like to see deer walking around, Bowman says.

To that end, ODOT's Wildlife Corridor program, which she says is currently unfunded, revolves around education. That leaping deer sign posted all around Oregon just doesn't get noticed. "Sign fatigue," Bowman says.

ODOT has a poster at DMV offices listing the damages as well as advice for avoiding hitting an animal. And Bowman says wildlife overcrossings and undercrossings combined with wildlife fencing to guide animals toward those crossings are 85 percent effective.

And while the beautiful and dramatic crossings in



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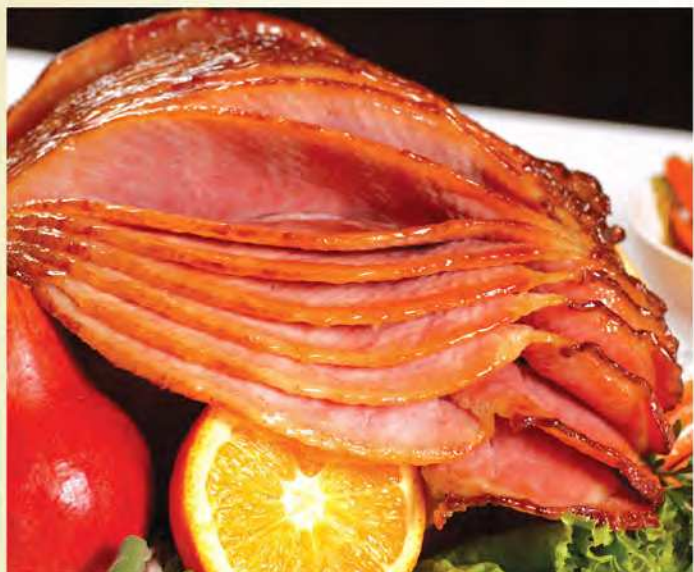
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