

british columbia news

Sunday, Nov 06,

Wildlife-vehicle collisions increase during mating season

(CP) - When it comes to wildlife and motor vehicle accidents in Canada, November is the cruelest month.

Swept away by the lure of mating season, amorous deer, elk and moose blindly blunder across highways and roads, sometimes actually running into speeding cars and trucks.

The resulting accidents not only kill and injure people, they cause tens of millions of dollars worth of accident claims and leave tens of thousands of wild animals dead every year.

And the carnage is getting worse with more motorists on the roads and as new highways and communities spread into rural areas.

In Alberta alone the numbers have more than doubled since 1991. There were 12,609 such accidents last year worth more than \$25 million in claims and health-care costs.

"We are moving into areas where there are more animals," said Scott Wilson of the Alberta Motor Association.

"Those are the sorts of things you are going to have happen when you start mixing animal habitat with humans and the additional amount of traffic."

Statistics for other provinces are also on the rise.

Ontario officials estimate the annual number of wildlife-vehicle accidents has almost doubled in the past decade to 13,729 - one every 38 minutes. Provincial transportation officials say many more go unreported.

In Manitoba, wildlife - mainly deer - were involved in 11,000 such collisions at a cost of \$20.4 million.

The accidents occurred everywhere from rural areas to cities such as Winnipeg, which reported 1,500 wildlife collisions in 2004.

"We've paid out nearly \$50-million in wildlife claims over the past three years," said Brian Smiley, a spokesman for Manitoba Public Insurance.

"We know of at least four fatalities over the past year directly attributed to deer wandering onto the road ways."

The statistics for other provinces are just as bad.

Ontario and British Columbia are dealing with the problem by installing fencing along major highways and clearing brush from roads to improve visibility.

Drivers are also being encouraged to slow down, wear their seat belts and to not assume an animal on a road or highway will get out of the way.

In Saskatchewan, the province has teamed up with the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation to promote a program this fall called Go Slow and Save a Little Doe.

The strategy includes a media blitz of billboard, radio and TV ads that warns motorists to keep their eyes peeled when driving through areas with big populations of deer and other wildlife.

In 2004, Saskatchewan Government Insurance reported almost 11,000 accident claims stemming from deer collisions that cost the system \$26.4 million.

Most of the accidents occurred just outside Regina and Saskatoon, where deer hunting is outlawed or severely restricted.

Darrell Crabbe, executive director of the wildlife federation, said during the November rut, motorists have to be extra safety conscious because the deer have only one thing on their minds.

"It's breeding season so the bucks are traveling in search of does. They hardly eat, they rarely sleep. Once they get on the trail of a doe, nothing else matters," he said.

"If that means traveling across the Trans-Canada Highway, well that is just too bad."

© The Canadian Press, 2005