

Watch for deer in the headlights — literally: Collisions with deer highest in November in NC

WUNC | By [Sophie Mallinson](#)

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Steve Hillebrand / U.S. Fish And Wildlife Service

White-tailed doe with tail flagged for danger, moving through shallow water.

Unfortunately, the sight of dead deer on the road is typical this time of year in North Carolina. According to data from the state Department of Transportation, November is when most deer and vehicle collisions occur in the Tar Heel State.

The data shows that between 2020 and 2022, November had [more than 13,000](#) animal crashes. That's about 5,000 more than the amount from October, just one month prior. In contrast, there are fewer than 4,000 animal collisions each month throughout spring and summertime. About 90% of animal crashes reported by the department involved deer.

Animal collisions by month

Total animal collisions by month in NC from 2020 to 2022

January	4,783
February	3,768
March	3,546
April	2,681
May	3,024
June	3,753
July	2,836
August	2,384
September	3,145
October	8,438
November	13,487
December	7,799

According to the N.C. Department of Transportation, approximately 90% of all reported animal related crashes involve deer

Chart: Jason deBruyn • Source: [NCDOT](#) • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Biologist Bret Ladrie of the [North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission](#) said such a trend is expected.

“Deer are very active in fall,” Ladrie said. “It’s probably their most active season. Between October and November is when we start to see the peak of the mating season. So, male deer, they’re now more active on the landscape looking for females. So, they’re going to cover wider areas of land. They’re a little more hormonal, so they may not be as aware of dangers around them.”

Meanwhile, female deer may also be traversing farther, specifically to avoid the males.





Ryan Hagerty / U.S. Fish And Wildlife Service

A white-tailed buck feeds in thicket.

Ladrie said that come November, food sources are also diminishing, so the deer wander more in search of patches of food. Throw in deer hunting season, and deer are on the move in November for a variety of reasons.

Deer are also a “crepuscular” species, according to Ladrie. That means they're most active at twilight. This time of year, the sun sets closer to when people get off work, so more cars are on the road during deer activity hours with decreased visibility.

Wake County consistently ranks first in the state for deer collisions. Ladrie attributed that largely to the region’s population growth and increasing development.

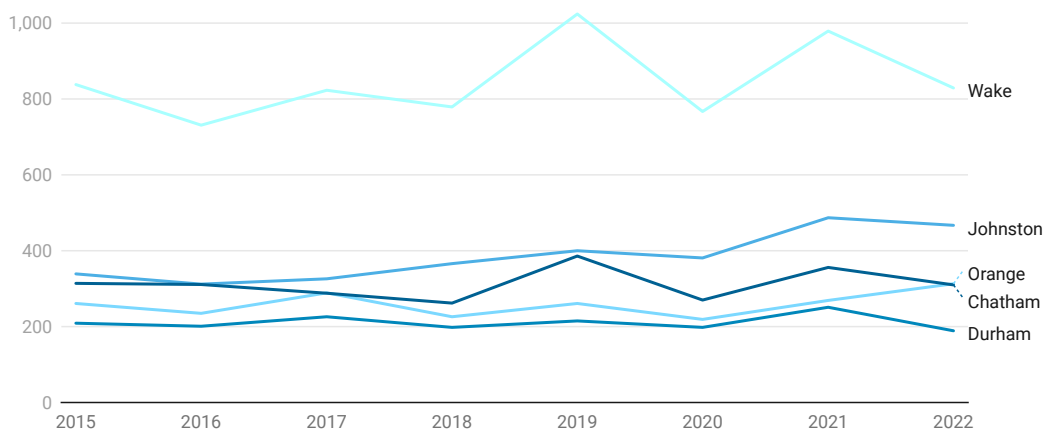
“The Raleigh area is growing outward steadily, incorporating different rural and urban areas,” Ladrie said. “With that comes more roads being constructed, more urban areas, tighter quarters where deer can find habitat. It facilitates them needing to cross roadways more often. Roads are kind of crisscrossing through areas that used to be unbroken deer habitat.”

Wake County also has a very high deer population in general. A 2020 [deer density map](#) showed Wake County had 41-50 deer per square mile. Ladrie said that density is high, with 20 to 30 deer per square mile considered ideal.



Animal collisions by county

Total animal collisions by Triangle county and year



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Chart: Jason deBruyn • Source: [NCDOT](#) • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datavrapper](#)

In city environments, more people means more food sources, like gardens or compost piles. Deer can then easily adapt to cities due to easier access to food. And, Ladrie said cities and towns may have restrictions on discharging firearms, meaning deer are generally safer from being hunted.

Given the fall's increased deer activity, Ladrie advised drivers to stay alert and make use of a car's high beams. If a deer crosses the road, Ladrie said drivers should slow down and expect more to cross too, as deer gather in groups.

In the event that a driver cannot fully stop, and a deer collision seems imminent, Ladrie emphasized that drivers should not swerve, as it's safer to hit deer than other vehicles.

Tags

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Sophie Mallinson

Sophie Mallinson is a daily news intern with WUNC for summer 2023. She is a recent graduate from UNC-Chapel Hill, where she studied journalism. Sophie is from Greenville, N.C., but she enjoys the new experiences of the Triangle area. During her time as a Tar Heel, Sophie was a reporter and producer for Carolina Connection, UNC-Chapel Hill's radio program. She currently is heavily involved in science education at Morehead Planetarium and Science Center.

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