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Conover, Michael R., "Safe driving suggestions for deer country" (2008). *Human–Wildlife Interactions*. 71.
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Editor's Introduction

Safe driving suggestions for deer country

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THIS ISSUE OF HUMAN–WILDLIFE CONFLICTS is dedicated to the topic of deer–vehicle collisions (DVCs). Within these pages, you will find numerous peer-reviewed articles and columns that provide valuable information about where, when, and why DVCs occur (Bissonette et al. 2008), their economic impact (Bissonette and Kasser 2008), their relationship to deer densities, and methods to reduce their frequency (Mastro et al. 2008). While we can never totally prevent DVCs from occurring, the information contained herein can help reduce their frequency (Curtis et al. 2008, DeNicola and Williams 2008, Miller et al. 2008, Rutberg and Naugle 2008).

I have always liked Adolf Murie's tongue-in-cheek suggestion for safe travel in bear country: select traveling companions that you can outrun. His suggestion has inspired me to write this column on safe driving suggestions when in deer country. Given the expanding deer populations (Storm 2007, DeNicola et al. 2008, Ng et al. 2008), I note that today almost everywhere is deer country, so I offer 4 suggestions for safe driving, based on my own driving experiences and close encounters with deer along roads.

1. The best way to avoid a DVC is also the most obvious. Motorists need to remember that at any moment a deer may cross the road in front of their vehicle. Hence, drivers need to stay alert, scan the roadway for deer, and slow down. This is particularly important when driving during dusk and dawn.
2. Motorists should realize that deer usually travel in groups. Too often, motorists see a deer by the road and do not slow down because that particular deer does not seem to be an immediate threat to them. However, it is the deer that motorists do not see that they are likely to hit. Deer often are located on both sides of the road.
3. Many DVCs occur at night when deer cannot be detected in the car's headlights in time to avoid a collision. For this reason, I always try to follow another vehicle when driving in deer country at night. By doing so, I know that if I can see the vehicle in front of me and its taillights, then a deer is not in the road in front of my vehicle.
4. My last suggestion is that motorists should contact their federal, state, and city highway departments and ask them to hire trained wildlife biologists to investigate the locations of DVCs; the aim is to determine what can be done to avoid DVCs from occurring at the same place in the future. For example, a white wooden



Michael R. Conover (Photo by Davis Archibald)

fence stretches several hundred meters along a curving road near my home. Inside the fence, the landowner keeps cattle, and he stores a week's worth of hay outside the fence on the road's right-of-way (ROW). The stored hay attracts deer to the ROW. When a car comes along, deer foraging on the stored hay are startled, but the fence prevents them from moving off the ROW on the side where the hay is located. Instead, they try to run across the road to the other side where there is cover. Unfortunately, each year several of them do not make it unharmed across the road. In this case, the solution to the problem is easy. The landowner should be asked to stop storing hay on the ROW. By hiring a wildlife biologist, transportation departments can prevent some DVCs and make our roads safer for both drivers and deer. It would be money well spent. *

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