



Vehicular collisions with deer continue to rise in Pa. This week could be the worst.

Human and deer overlap is growing, fueling a wave of health and road safety concerns



ROBERTA BURKHART ✓
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
rburkhart@post-gazette.com x

NOV 9, 2025

4:00 AM

If you think you've noticed more deer darting across roads or lingering at the edge of your headlights, that's not your imagination.

Pennsylvania, consistently among the worst for collisions between wildlife and vehicles, has seen crashes due to deer rising over the past five years, with 6,426 such collisions in 2024, per [data from PennDOT](#).

And, beware, this week could add mightily to 2025's tally.

"The peak of the rut in Pennsylvania is between the 12th and the 18th of

November. It's the worst time to be driving," said Don Wagner, the deer unit manager at Penn State University in State College.



"Bucks are extending their home range. They're going out farther, looking for does," he said.

Young males can wander miles to avoid inbreeding, "which is why we see a spike in roadside activity that time of year."

And peak wandering season won't end anytime soon. Mr. Wagner noted that, in Pennsylvania, breeding season runs from mid-October to mid-December.

Nationwide, per [U.S. Geological Survey estimates](#), more than a million wildlife-vehicle collisions occur every year, with a majority involving white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*). The costs run high: more than 200 fatalities and more than \$4.6 billion in damages annually.



A 10 point buck meanders through the forested pens at Penn State's 23-acre Deer Research Center in State College.
(Justin Guido/Post-Gazette)

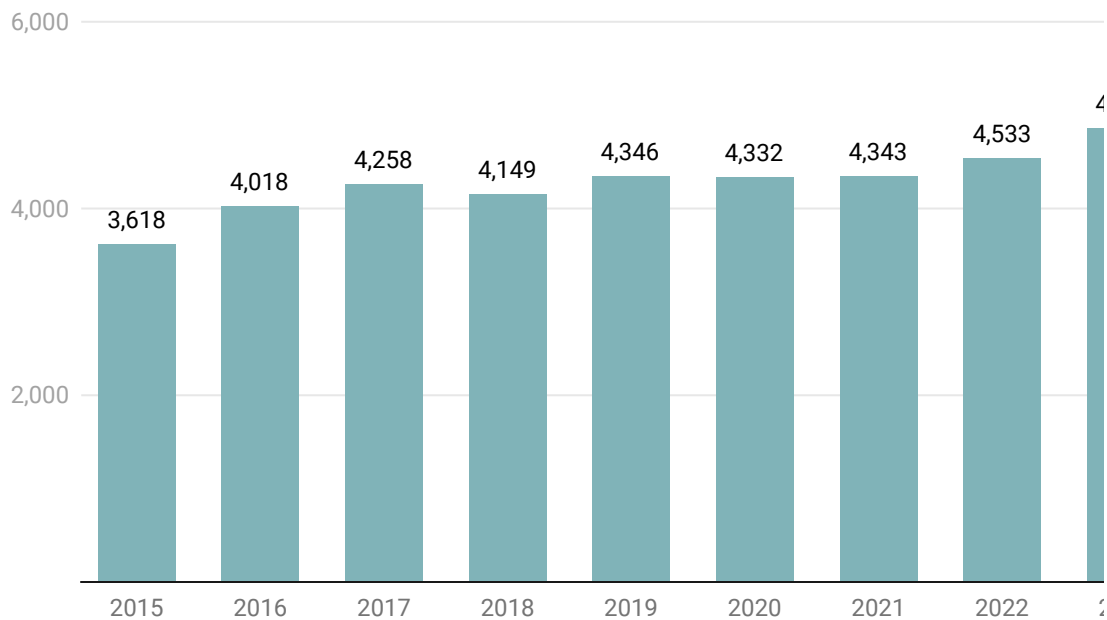
The actual number of collisions is likely even higher.

“Deer-related crashes are frequently unreported because the vehicle only sustains minor damage and there are no injuries,” said Trooper Todd Bingman, community services officer with Troop E of the Pennsylvania State Police, in a [PennDot news release](#) last month.

“However, drivers are required to contact the police if the vehicle is damaged severely enough where it cannot be driven from the scene or there is a death or injury to a person involved.”

He advised motorists to call 911 if unsure.

Pa. motor vehicle crashes involving deer



Source: [Pa. Department of Transportation](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Reasons behind the rise

Public health experts — also concerned about the animal’s role in spreading tick-borne disease, such as Lyme — say the overlap between humans and deer is growing, as herds thrive in suburban neighborhoods where natural predators are largely absent and hunting is limited.

When deer move to areas where more people live and, especially, drive, that heightens danger for both species, said Mr. Wagner.



Don Wagner, manager of Penn State's Deer Research Center, pets Peanut, a special needs doe. The center houses about 50 white-tailed deer that are used for research and education. (Justin Guido/Post-Gazette)

Feeding deer only amplifies the problem.

“You don't want to congregate animals artificially,” he said, explaining that providing steady food sources can spread chronic wasting disease and epizootic hemorrhagic disease, two illnesses that are fatal for deer.

“You're bringing animals into nose-to-nose contact that otherwise would not have been so close.”

Providing food to backyard herds can also quickly lead to overpopulation, he said.

“Their reproductive rate is actually closely tied to their nutrition levels. So if there's plenty of resources out there, and they have lots of food, the does will have more fawns,” Mr. Wagner said.

Deer can quickly adapt to a variety of surroundings and thrive in places that are not best suited for them.

“I do have a relative who used to live in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., and they watched a deer eat a pizza,” Mr. Wagner recalled.

The vegetation from lawn landscaping, backyard gardens and city parks offers a delicious smorgasbord for deer who wander in from forests.

In the suburbs and urban areas like Pittsburgh, coyotes or an occasional dog may thin the number of fawns, but once deer grow over a certain size, there are no natural predators to keep their population in check.



A 10 point buck surveys his surroundings at the Penn State Deer Research Center in State College.

(Justin Guido/Post-Gazette)

The overpopulation problem

Pittsburgh has been tracking the increasing deer population for years, said Erica Heide, who oversees the city's deer management program. A 2023 pilot program launched the city's first official deer management effort, partnering with the U.S. Department of Agriculture for controlled archery hunts in Frick and Riverview parks.

City deer populations double every two to three years, she said, with most mature does breeding every single year — “and 85% of births are twins or triplets.”

Encouraged by the results of the initial archery hunt — [108 deer downed in Frick and Riverview parks](#) in the 2023-24 season, with 59 donated to food pantries, providing nearly 2,400 pounds of venison for more than 9,400 people — the city expanded.

In 2024 and 2025, the city's Schenley, Emerald View and Highland parks were added to the archery hunts, in addition to nighttime targeted harvesting by the USDA in Frick and Riverview parks. This year, as of Nov. 3, hunters have harvested 61 deer, amounting to 1,400 pounds of venison donated to food pantries.

"We have a controlled, ethical program," Ms. Heide said. "We're taking into mind our archers, our deer, and the public that is also attending the park."

Numbers illustrate why management is needed, she said.

"From 2004 to 2023, we've had an increase in carcass pickup by 411%," Ms. Heide said.

"In 2004, we had 140 deer picked up." By 2023, that number had grown to 575.

Carcass pickup tallies come from all city streets, excluding state highways like Route 28 and I-279.

"When we're dealing with overpopulation, it's unsafe for humans, it's unsafe for the environment, but it's really unsafe for the deer herd," Ms. Heide said.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission monitors deer numbers statewide through several methods, including field surveys, harvest data and habitat assessments. Based on those estimates, the commission determines how many antlered and antlerless licenses to issue each year.

Pennsylvania's rifled deer [hunting season](#) begins Nov. 29 and runs until Dec. 9.

Population control — "The easiest solution and the most cost effective" — remains a divisive but essential management tool in reducing deer herds in urban and suburban neighborhoods, Mr. Wagner said.

“Outside of controlling the deer populations through hunting, there's really no way to reduce the deer population. So then it gets to the point where either starvation or disease kick in,” he said.

But consensus about how to best control the deer population remains elusive. “Nobody can agree.”

The cost

What everyone can agree on is that deer-vehicle collisions are costly — in terms of money, property and lives.

According to a [yearly report from insurer State Farm](#), an estimated 1.7 million animal-collision insurance claims were filed in the U.S. between July 2024 and July 2025 — a slight dip from 1.8 million the year before. Deer accounted for more than 1.1 million of those incidents.

Vehicle–deer collisions statewide

ROADSIDE OBJECTS MOST OFTEN INVOLVED IN A CRASH

As a percentage of all crashes statewide, 2024

	ROADSIDE OBJECT	CRASHES	% OF ALL CRASHES
1	Utility pole(s)	7,665	6.9%
2	Parked vehicle	6,903	6.2%
3	Tree(s) or shrubs/hedges	6,448	5.8%
4	Guiderail	5,847	5.3%
5	Deer	5,111	4.6%
6	Embankment	4,897	4.4%
7	Median barrier	3,593	3.2%
8	Curb	3,054	2.8%
9	Other fixed object	2,866	2.6%
10	Ditch	2,524	2.3%

Note: A single crash can involve a collision with multiple objects.

Source: PennDOT

James Hilston/Post-Gazette

In Pennsylvania, 1 in 62 drivers is expected to collide with an animal — the fifth-highest rate in the nation, behind West Virginia (leading the nation

with a rate of 1 in 40), followed by Montana, Wisconsin and Michigan, per State Farm.

Research continues into why deer behave unpredictably near roads.

In a [June study](#) published in Applied Animal Behavior Science, researchers exposed captive white-tailed deer to simulated head-on vehicle-collision scenarios. They found that halogen high beams triggered stronger alert responses than LED headlights — though lighting type didn't reliably affect whether deer froze or fled.

Broader solutions such as road design, fencing and population control, the study concluded, remain the most effective ways to reduce collisions.

Research and ecology

While debate continues over how best to manage deer populations, researchers at Penn State are working to better understand the animals' complex relationship with humans and their health and ecological impacts.



Two of the approximately 50 white-tailed deer at Penn State's Deer Research Center pick their way through trees displaying all their autumn glory.
(Justin Guido/Post-Gazette)

Just north of Penn State's Beaver Stadium, Mr. Wagner manages the 23-acre Deer Research Center, within the Department of Animal Science, home to about 50 animals used for research and education. The deer center dates to the early 1950s; the current site, its third, was established in 1972.

Mr. Wagner said the deer are used to study immune responses to tick bites and aspects of chronic wasting disease — not the disease itself, but potential preventive measures, such as fencing techniques to reduce its spread.

[Chronic wasting disease](#) was first reported in Pennsylvania in 2012, per the state. White-tailed deer are also subject to [epizootic hemorrhagic disease](#), one of two kinds of hemorrhagic diseases in the species. It was first isolated by scientists in 1955, although outbreaks of similar diseases have been described since 1890.

While the two diseases can spread quickly through herds, Mr. Wagner noted neither is known to infect humans, and venison from infected deer — if properly cooked — poses no known danger to people.

Even so, wildlife officials keep a close watch on the health of the state's herds.

More deer means more ticks — and greater potential exposure for people who live, garden or hike nearby.

“Deer are basically transportation for ticks,” explained Timothy Driscoll, an associate professor in West Virginia University's biology department. “A single tick can feed for up to a week while the host travels miles across neighborhoods and parks.”

Mr. Driscoll noted that deer blood “appears to contain something that kills the bacterium responsible for Lyme disease outright,” an area of active research that “could someday lead to human therapies.”

Per the Pennsylvania [Tick-Borne Disease Dashboard](#), there were more than 16,600 Lyme cases across Pennsylvania in 2024 and 16,384 so far in 2025, as of Nov. 5.

Lyme disease represents only part of the problem from the symbiotic relationship between deer and ticks, Erika Machtinger, an associate

professor of entomology and the extension vector-borne disease team lead at Penn State University's department of entomology, told the Post-Gazette this summer.

There's also anaplasmosis, babesiosis, Powassan virus, Alpha-gal syndrome — what people call the red meat allergy, Southern tick associated rash illness, or STARI, and Rocky Mountain spotted fever among other, more rare illnesses.

Another disease, ehrlichiosis, is unique, Mr. Driscoll explained, in that deer can be a reservoir for the illness and if a tick bites an infected deer, it can pass that disease-causing bacteria to humans.

Ehrlichiosis is the general name used to describe a group of diseases caused by three specific bacteria that are spread via bites from lone star and blacklegged ticks. Symptoms are usually mild, but if left untreated can lead to organ and brain damage or death, [per the CDC](#).

"We love to see deer in our yard," Mr. Driscoll said.

However, "if you're actively recruiting them to your yard, you're going to bring ticks closer, too."

First Published: November 9, 2025, 4:00 a.m.

Updated: November 10, 2025, 12:13 a.m.

Tags: Pittsburgh Pests



Roberta Burkhart is a Post-Gazette health and wellness reporter. A Penn State graduate, she previously covered breaking news, lifestyles and arts & entertainment in Pittsburgh, Williamsport, and Morristown, N.J.

✉ rburkhart@post-gazette.com

✕ [@njberty](#)

Popular in the Community

AdChoices 

Sponsored

No, Gene Collier, Donald Trump was...



Whatabout

Whatever one may think of Harris, she still has...



Top Comment



19

Brian B. Rodgers



ste

Rodgers would like



Top Co