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DRIVERS: BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR DEER IN THE ROADWAYS

(10/P113) TRENTON -- With the days getting shorter and white-tail deer entering their annual rut, officials with the Department of Environmental Protection's Division of Fish and Wildlife are cautioning motorists to be especially alert while driving to avoid collisions with the animals.

While deer may cross roads at any time, they are most active during the dawn and dusk hours, said DEP wildlife officials.

"Once daylight-saving time ends, normal driver commuting times will more closely align with the peak deer activity," said Division of Fish and Wildlife Director David Chanda. "Commuters should remain especially alert and drive with particular caution as a result. Deer are unpredictable. They typically move in family groups and cross single-file. Drivers need to take extra caution to avoid collisions, as well as the possibility of serious injury."

Deer migrate and mate during the fall months. In many instances, deer will wander closer to roads and may literally stop in the middle of a road, cross over and then re-cross. If you spot a deer, slow down and pay attention to sudden movement. If the deer doesn't move, don't go around it. Wait until the road is clear. And if you spot one deer, be alert for others.

"It's critical for motorists to remain on high alert, since deer can come out of nowhere, and unexpectedly dart in front of your vehicle," said Division of Highway Traffic Safety Director Pam Fischer. "If you're traveling in wooded areas or near open fields, slow down below the posted speed limit, so you'll have ample time to stop and allow deer to cross the roadway."

If you are traveling after dark, use high beams where there is no on-coming traffic. High beams will illuminate the eyes of deer on or near roads and provide better reaction time for a motorist.

DEP offers the following tips for driving during deer season:

- * Don't tailgate. Remember: the driver in front of you might have to stop suddenly to avoid hitting a deer.
- * Always wear a seat belt, as required by law. And drive at a safe, sensible speed for conditions.
- * If it appears you are going to collide with a deer, don't swerve to avoid impact. The animal may counter-manuever. Brake firmly, but stay in your lane. Fatalities are more likely when a driver swerves to avoid a deer and instead, collides with oncoming traffic or a permanent structure in the road.
- * You should report any deer-vehicle collision to a local law enforcement agency immediately.

For more information about deer in New Jersey, visit the DEP's Fish and Wildlife Web site:
www.njfishandwildlife.com.

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