

Deer and Humans

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Collisions with deer kill 15 to 20 UK motorists a year, and injure 1,800, according to a recent article in the *Evening Standard*. The article gave advice on how to avoid a collision (for example, "Keep back from the car in front; fatalities often result from deer thrown up by other traffic ..."), but did not say how deer should avoid collisions or how many deer are killed or injured. Indeed, it said very little about the deer.

There are now 700,000 wild deer in the UK and the population is growing very rapidly – the article says that "without intervention" it grows at 30% a year - so the conflict with humans can only get worse.

The Park's deer population is controlled in a yearly cull, and is stable at 630. But we humans still manage to kill a fair number through collisions with cars, out-of-control dogs and litter.

Some 5-10 Park deer a year are killed by cars; this has halved since 2004 when the speed limit was reduced from 30 to 20 mph, but some drivers still speed they seem to responsible for most deaths (drivers usually don't stop, so only examination of the deer shows it has been hit by a car).

Uncontrolled dogs kill 6 or so deer a year, mainly baby deer in their first weeks, left in the undergrowth while their mothers graze nearby. A dog comes across a baby deer, the deer tries to flee, the dog automatically chases it, the deer cannot run fast enough to escape, and the dog brings it down. Occasionally a dog will chase a herd and maul a fully grown deer, which then has to be destroyed.

Litter kills around 5 deer a year. This is a guess, based on the post-mortems done when a deer dies unexpectedly. The deer's stomach typically contains rope and string, black dog waste bags, plastic of different kinds, and parts of clothing - all material that deer cannot digest. These deer die slow, agonising deaths from starvation. Deer, much like goats, will eat anything, which helps them survive in the wild, but is disastrous when humans are around.

So, we Park users kill around 20 deer a year in painful deaths, not the painless sudden shot to the head from the cull. Simple arithmetic says that a Park deer has a 1 in 30 chance of being killed by humans – and no humans die in return. Doesn't seem fair does it?