

Deer Initiative Deer-Vehicle-Collisions Project to Continue

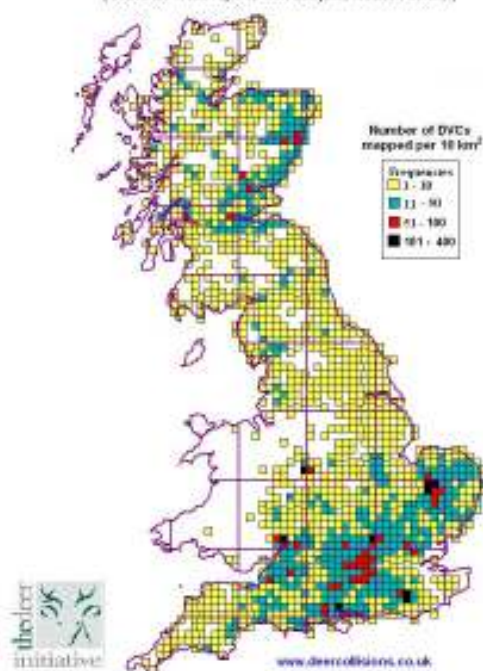
Traffic collisions involving deer have presented a major animal welfare problem in the UK for many years, and lead to around 500 human personal injury accidents and several human fatalities every year. Ever increasing numbers of deer vehicle collisions (DVCs) are also reported throughout much of Western Europe and North America, with figures in the US alone now running at over 1,500,000 DVCs per year.

The UK National Deer-Vehicle-Collisions Project was set up in 2003 through *The Deer Initiative* with lead funding for the study coming from the *Highways Agency* and the *Scottish Executive*. The main aims of the project for the first three years were to assess for the first time the true nationwide scale and geographical distribution of the problem, and build a database to help identify hot spots and priority areas for mitigation.



As there is no legal obligation to report collisions with deer or other wild animals to any authority, the research could at best aim to obtain as large and stratified a sample of records as possible via a wide range of potential data sources including roads authorities, police, insurance companies, forestry managers, animal welfare organisations and others involved in dealing with injured deer at the road side, along with additional reports logged by individuals at the dedicated project web-site www.deercollisions.co.uk. By December 2005 over 30,500 distinct records had already been collated by the project, providing a good basis for national mapping; and through comparison of data samples captured by differing sources enabled estimation that the true toll of deer involved in collisions with vehicles in Britain is unlikely to lie below 42,500 and may well exceed 74,000 per annum (Deer Initiative, 2007). Over 80% of DVCs each year are recorded in England, with highest frequencies consistently from the South-East where traffic volumes are also greatest. Given that Scotland has somewhere in excess of 50% of Britain's deer population the low percentage of DVCs recorded there may seem surprising, but once traffic volume is taken into consideration the actual risk of involvement in a collision with a deer is in fact roughly twice as high per vehicle-mile driven in Scotland as compared to England.

Relative frequency of Deer-Vehicle Collisions for Great Britain reported to the project between January 2003 to December 2005 (based on 17035 reports with adequate location details)



With ever increasing traffic levels and continuing spread of deer into peri-urban areas it is inevitable that this problem will continue to worsen unless concerted action is taken. The project has now been given further support by *Highways Agency* and the *Deer Commission for Scotland* to continue to monitor trends in DVCs over the coming years, focussing mainly on the best national sources of data including RSPCA and SSPCA, road maintenance contractors, police accident records, and forestry and deer managers. In addition, since 2005 the Deer Initiative project has turned increasingly towards looking into preventative measures, both through media releases to raise public awareness at a national level (timed to coincide with annual peaks of DVCs during late autumn and spring), as well as initiating practical roadside trials to assess the potential of novel wildlife deterrents and interactive road signage. To date evidence remains lacking for any lasting effect of acoustic or optical wildlife deterrents under UK traffic conditions, or indeed for most other individual preventative methods. At high risk sites best results are likely to be achieved through working in close partnership with road authorities, forest and deer managers to develop local DVC prevention strategies which carefully integrate those roadside measures most suited to

the local situation with action to raise public awareness and management of the deer population.

[For fuller reports on the DVC project link to <http://www.deercollisions.co.uk/pages/latest.html> ; and for further information about other work of The Deer Initiative see www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk]