

Chautauqua Watershed Notes
From the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy
November 2, 2008

Deer in the Headlights

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For the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy



This is the most dangerous time of year for car-deer collisions. "Think deer" and always wear your safety belt. (Photo courtesy of Michael Keating.)

Last Saturday night my wife and I were traveling eastbound on Interstate 86, between the Strunk Road and Jamestown exits, when our car struck a deer. It was a big doe, she appeared out of the darkness all in an instant and I hit her at highway speed – no time to react. Two other cars hit her before it was all over. Our car was wrecked but thank God we were all right.

I think I'm a good driver. One reason I am especially careful on the highway is because of deer crossing the road. The way I see it, in an area as heavily populated with deer as the Chautauqua Watershed, what appears at any given moment to be a clear stretch of highway is a "forest" of deer. Some are crossing a couple hundred yards ahead of you and you don't see them. Others cross as soon as you pass by; you don't see these either. Still others cross just ahead of you in time for you to slow down and carefully avoid a collision, as I did two weeks ago on Route 60 when I "threaded the needle" between a six-point buck and a doe following close behind. My point is that deer are crossing roads constantly so there is nothing especially unlucky about hitting one. According to the New York State Sheriff's Association Institute, 38,000 to 57,000 car-deer crashes occur annually on New York State Roads. However, even though car-deer crashes are common, the following tips, also from the NYS Sheriff's Association Institute, can help you avoid one:

Be especially alert during the peak crash months of October, November and December, our hunting season and their mating time, when deer are most stressed and their behavior most unpredictable.

Deer naturally feed and move in the dawn and dusk hours. This is a good defense against natural predators but a real problem time for drivers. Be especially careful during these times of limited visibility.

Deer are herd animals. If you see one by, or in, the roadway, slow down and be prepared to stop. There are probably others about to cross.

If startled by the sounds or lights of a vehicle, or any other threat, deer will bolt from the perceived danger without regard for the consequences. Be ready for erratic behavior.

Use your high beams at night and at times of limited visibility, when there is no oncoming traffic. This will illuminate the eyes of deer approaching or already in the roadway.

No matter the season or time of day, always use special caution in areas marked with deer crossing signs.

If you see deer in the roadway, attempt to warn oncoming vehicles by flashing your headlights.

Always wear your seatbelt and drive at a safe and prudent speed for conditions.

When driving at a normal speed and surprised by a deer, don't swerve your vehicle to avoid striking it. Reactive, evasive moves can result in a loss of vehicle control. It is generally better to hit the deer than to run into an oncoming vehicle or a fixed object like a tree.

In short, "think deer" whenever you are behind the wheel, and drive defensively, as if a deer can appear at any moment – because it can.

The Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy is a private, not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) organization with a mission to preserve and enhance the water quality, scenic beauty and ecological health of the lakes, streams and watersheds of the Chautauqua region. Its urgent focus is to conserve the endangered natural shore lands of Chautauqua Lake, which provide fish and wildlife habitat and pollution filtering functions essential to a healthy lake. Only four miles (10%) of the lake's shoreline remains in a natural, undeveloped condition. The Conservancy is funded primarily through membership donations. Its 2008 annual membership campaign is currently underway. It is presently raising funds to conserve the Chautauqua Lake's most important remaining natural shoreline habitats, undertake programs to address the root causes of the conditions that fuel lake plant growth, and manage its preserves. It is the only local organization

conserving lands in perpetuity for these purposes. Please contact the Conservancy at 664-2166 to join for 2008!