

## A Celestial Wonder

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evening to provide a more varied observing experience.

Outside, they found additional portable telescopes in action, attended by other docents who enjoy assisting visitors. The adjacent outdoor Sky Theater provided a place to rest in comfort beneath the starry sky while enjoying a program of interactive presentations by knowledgeable staff. Kari's spouse commented on how dark the sky appeared. The restrooms, illuminated by red lights to retain everyone's night vision, were also appreciated.

Behind the main building they spotted a tall structure topped by a white dome. A docent explained that the structure contains a research-grade imaging telescope dedicated for future academic research projects by qualified students from schools in the county. The Covid epidemic has negatively impacted its use, but hope is high for the future.

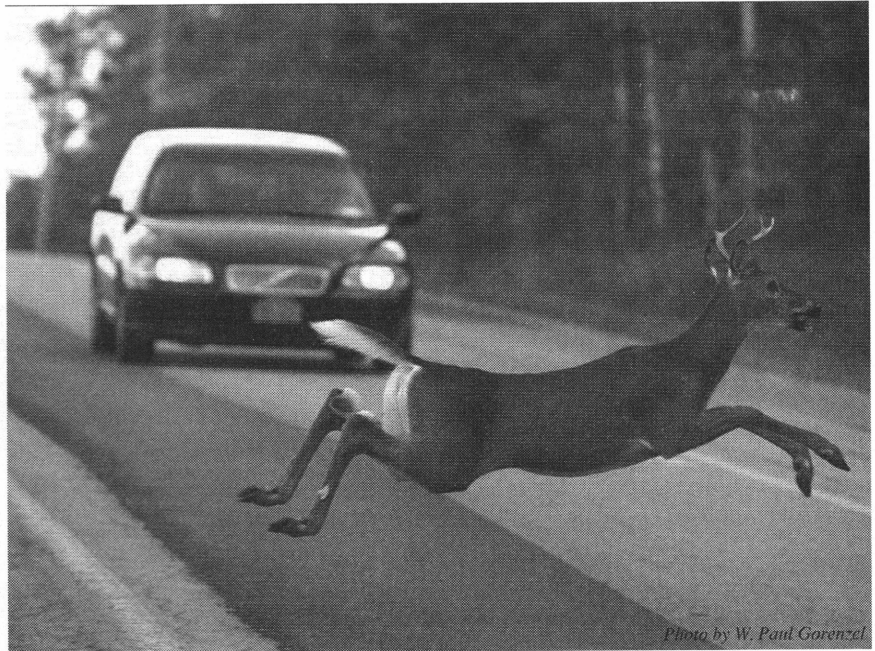
According to Kari, the short drive home was filled with conversation about their evening at the observatory. Kari's husband even expressed a desire to return to the observatory to observe our moon through the telescopes.

The couple is just two of more than 100,000 visitors who have walked up the pathway to the Community Observatory since the 2005 opening.

If I were a wagering man, I would bet we'll soon learn that Kari has become an Observatory docent herself, joining the cadre of dedicated volunteers who make our Community Observatory one of El Dorado County's wonders.

*Forrest Lockhart cherishes the many docent hours spent up on the hill.*

**"Shoot for the moon.  
Even if you miss, you'll land  
among the stars."** Les Brown



## A Perfect Storm: Deer and Backroads

They are prevalent now — dawn to dusk — due to mating season and being in their ideal habitat.

By Kathleen Jermstad

### Outdoors

Recent research has shown that our eyesight is best at dawn and dusk. It's a good thing because that is when you need those peepers working well when driving our foothills backroads. Deer pose the most likely threat of a wildlife-vehicle collision (WVC).

Being confronted with deer on county roads can not only result in damage to the vehicle and harm to the occupants but also can cause psychological trauma. In

particular, child passengers can get very upset; they may view animals as animated characters from their favorite Pixar movie. No one likes to see an animal suffer.

In 2008, the Federal Highway Administration reported to Congress that an estimate of 1-2 million WVCs occur in the United States every year. The annual cost of this was calculated at \$8,388,000,000 with deer-vehicle collisions comprising the single largest collision category.

A deer-vehicle collision averages about \$6,000 in expenses. That includes auto repair, human injuries, human fatalities, first responders and investigation, hunting value loss and carcass removal. Anyone colliding with a deer knows the hardship it causes and the remorse about the deer as well.

Many of our backroads allow travel in excess of 55 mph. Some examples are Pleasant Valley Road, Mother Lode Drive, Green Valley Road and Mormon Emigrant

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# Watch for Deer on the Backroads

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## Outdoors

Trail. Traveling at these speeds allow little chance of avoiding a collision with a deer when one pops out onto the road. However, speeds less than 45 mph allow a driver to slow down and avoid impact. Be mindful that where there is one deer, there are probably one to three more nearby.

The three major risk factors for colliding with deer are:

- 1) where there is good habitat
- 2) between dusk and dawn, and
- 3) mating season.

Good habitat is pretty much everywhere here in the foothills, but be especially wary near riparian areas (lakes, rivers) and drainages; transitions between forests and open areas; where a roadside fence ends; where game trails are evident. Most deer encounters occur at night but, in neighborhoods where residents are friendly to deer, you can encounter deer at any time.

A deer's eyes have a unique structure called the tapetum lucidum that amplifies light, enabling them to see well in dim light. Unfortunately, this sensitivity to light causes them to have that "deer in the headlights" reaction. Their eyes are stationary, and their vision works to detect objects that move across their field of vision, not so much for objects coming toward them.

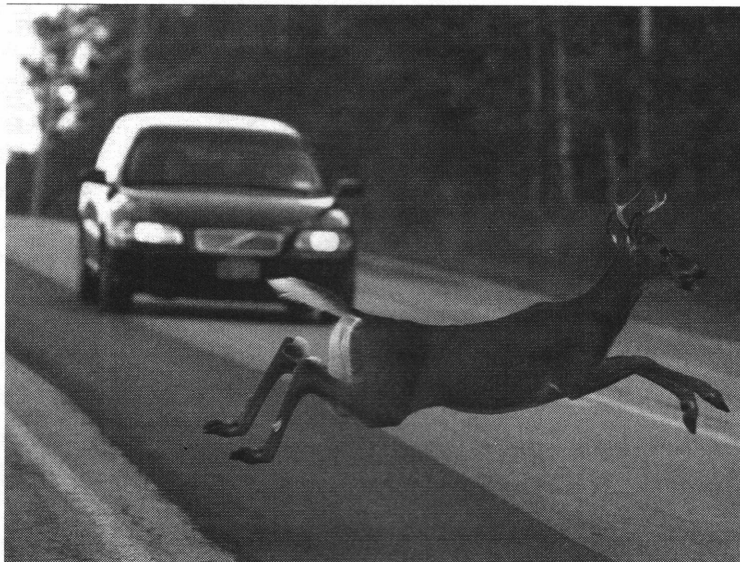


Photo by W. Paul Gorenzel

windshield visibility is poor.

Research is ongoing for roadside early-detection and deterrent systems, and for wildlife warning systems in vehicles but, so far, trials have produced inconsistent results. Therefore, situational awareness is the best way to avoid hitting a deer. Be alert.

Finally, if hitting a deer is unavoidable, apply the brakes to decrease impact but lift off the brakes right before impact. This will raise the front of the vehicle and help to prevent the deer from coming through your windshield. Though it might be our gut reaction,

swerving to miss a deer, especially at high speeds, can have dire consequences.

Information presented here is from the Forest Service video *Avoiding Wildlife-Vehicle Collisions*: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJsCfadbl4M>) and the FHWA-HRT-08-034 Report (<https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/research/safety/08034/>)

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An oncoming car looks stationary to them. So, when they get that dumbfounded look as you approach, remember that they are confounded and just trying to figure it out.

Since deer mating season occurs in the fall, October and November present the highest likelihood for a WVC. The rest of the year, they are a bit more cautious about stepping out onto the road. However, that caution flies to the wind when their hormones are fired up to find a mates so they will take risks not normally taken.

The expert advice also is to be vigilant in the spring when they travel to their summer ranges. Here's some good news: deer seek shelter during foul weather when our

## Local Groups and Clubs . . . . .

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**The El Dorado Community Round Table** on Human Rights was meeting monthly. To get updates on meeting in person, contact 530-622-1368, [www.edchumanrights.org](http://www.edchumanrights.org).

**Active 20-30 Club** - is a non-profit that provides adults ages 20-39 an opportunity for personal growth and friendships. More info: [www.hangtown2030.com](http://www.hangtown2030.com)

**Snowline Hospice** - Snowline invites individuals who want to make a difference in the lives of others to learn about volunteer positions in office work, delivery service, patient care and grief support. To serve patients and families in your community of El Dorado County, call 530-621-7820 for the latest information.

**Big Brothers Big Sisters** - Be a Big Bro or Big Sis to children and youth waiting to be matched with mentors. There are a number of ways you can get involved and contribute to the program. For more information and updates regarding in-person interviews and facial mask requirements: 530-626-1222 and [www.mentors4youth.org](http://www.mentors4youth.org)