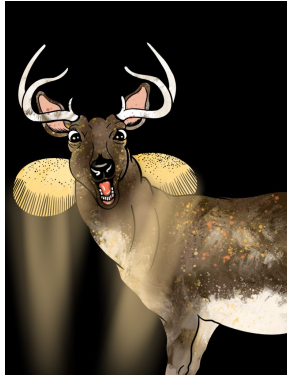


Deer population continues to pose threat to BU's nature, drivers

Broome County drivers face 252 accidents with deer since last November

By MELANIE GULBAS - NOVEMBER 11, 2019



Taylor Hayes/Pipe Dream Illustrator

Besides the slippery conditions and winter weather, there is another pressing challenge that drivers in Binghamton have to face — the growing deer population.

This is especially true during the first few weeks of November, which is the deers' peak breeding season, according to Lt. Brian VanDervort of Binghamton's New York State University Police (UPD).

According to the Broome County Sheriff's Office, since November 2018, there have been a total of 252 vehicle-versus-deer accidents reported in the Broome County area, eight of which caused injuries to the vehicle occupants. The majority of the reported accidents occurred during dawn and dusk, which are the times when deer are most active.

Binghamton University's Nature Preserve and the rest of campus have struggled with white-tailed deer overpopulation, which creates an environmental imbalance as well as a driving hazard. Surveys done by the University indicate that the Nature Preserve is home to 260 deer, rather than a healthy balance of 15 to 20 deer. The Nature Preserve has lost a large portion of its understory forest because of the issue, according to the BU Nature Preserve's Deer Management Plan website.

The University's Committee on University Environment held a controlled hunt in the Nature Preserve last year to try and manage the deer population and help restore the land.

Dylan Horvath, steward of BU's natural areas, wrote in an email that last year's controlled bowhunt in the Nature Preserve was a pilot program to explore how feasible it would be to do controlled bowhunting on the property.

"We really didn't have any expectation of a dramatic decrease of the deer population with the limited scope of the pilot program," Horvath wrote. "There aren't any results to be seen yet as it was just a pilot program and, no matter what the outcome of hunting, we wouldn't see changes in

deer impacts until years later.”

The deer population leaks onto campus streets, which poses a threat to drivers. Jacqueline Witschel, a senior majoring in English, hit a deer a few feet away from campus last year. Witschel said the deer took her by surprise.

“I was driving down Vestal Parkway when a deer jumped out of nowhere,” Witschel said. “This was so scary because it was dark, and I never expected to see a deer trying to cross the main road. I’m from the city, so I don’t normally see animals when I’m driving.”

Witschel said she is lucky that she was not injured and wants other students to focus on the road in order to stay safe.

“I hope that other students pay close attention when driving,” Witschel said. “Not only can you injure the deer, but you can really hurt yourself.”

Lt. Benjamin Harting of the Broome County Sheriff’s Office said while avoiding deer on the road, it is important to not risk the safety of others for the well-being of the deer.

“Do not risk the life of persons in the vehicle, other operators on the roadway or pedestrians to avoid striking the deer,” Harting said. “Don’t drive off the roadway into a ditch to avoid striking a deer.”

VanDervort said although UPD does not see many reported vehicle-versus-deer accidents, it does not mean they aren’t occurring. He said it is important, especially during this time of year, to be extra cautious while driving around campus.

“There’s no secret that there’s a lot of deer on campus,” VanDervort said. “The deer on campus are typically not as standoffish as deer in more rural settings, but you will see a lot more auto vehicle accidents because deer are breeding and focused on breeding — not so much paying attention to where they are going.”