



Bike Animal Crashes

Strategy for animals is hard. Animals are unpredictable, often well camouflaged, and don't know the rules of the road.

We can't prevent or control animal interactions, and a deer impact can be fatal.

Our best bet with animals is to be aware of the sorts of places and times animals are more likely to be found, to be extra vigilant for animals, to slow down and maybe cover the brakes.

The most frequent animal problem is deer, elk, moose and caribou. We have heard of issues with alligators, snakes and land-crabs. Squirrels, cats and small animals can also be a problem. A different category of animal crashes involve carnivores, principally loose dogs but possibly panthers, mountain lions and other predators. In parts of the country, cattle and sheep range freely and can get on the road or herders use public roads to move stock.

Every biker knows someone who has had a large herbivore crash, or has had close calls. We think this is a bigger issue than many allow for.

Animal Crashes: the facts

We consider large herbivores, principally white-tailed deer, mule deer and moose to be the most lethal animal crash causation.

Top 10 states for deer crash fatalities, all vehicle types, 2013. Source: Deercrash.com

State	Fatalities
Texas	18
Pennsylvania	15
Montana	10
Michigan	9
Minnesota	8
Ohio	8
Tennessee	8
Colorado	7
Kansas	7
Wisconsin	7

Deer and Herbivore Strategies.

It's essential to know when to expect deer. First, the ten states from the [Deercrash.com](#) site above are the most common states, but deer, elk and moose can be encountered almost anywhere.

Deer like forests with occasional grassy areas, but they can be encountered anywhere, including cities.

Mule deer and other species, especially in the West, have regular migration patterns. Check [Deercrash.com](#) for tips on animal migration patterns that might affect your upcoming ride, especially if going to an area with which you are unfamiliar.

Deer are seen more at dusk and dawn, and, as they don't like insects any more than humans do, they sometimes move out of the trees and into open spaces near roads to avoid them. If you are getting a lot of bugs on your visor, you might also look out for deer.

Signs



Deer, moose and wild herbivores. An obvious sign to look out for are the yellow diamonds with the deer silhouette. Road authorities generally put the signs up in response to reported deer crashes or deer carcasses found by the road. Be aware that not all localities do this.

Deer carcasses by the side of the road are another clear sign to look out for. If you see one deer, there may be more close by, because they are herd critters. You might also see signs for bears, alligators, panthers and other animals in various places.

Strategies for Animals

There are various purported countermeasures available to individuals. [Motorcyclecriuser.com](#) details some studies on deer whistles that suggest they don't work, in fact, in one study the deer might have been attracted to the whistles. The whistles themselves can be clogged by road dirt and bugs and stop working, and as you can't hear the ultrasonic noise, you'll never know. Put not your faith in anti-animal devices. Deer repellent doesn't seem practical either, as it'll be smelt mostly from the rear.

This means that our best bet is to carefully look out for deer, and when you know there's a good chance of some being around, take extra precautions. Slow down a bit, maybe cover the brake. The biker advantage of height and no blind spots is the only thing going for us, as it improves our chances of seeing the deer. The usual visual scanning rules apply. Our chances of seeing a moving target are better in our peripheral vision, so keeping our eyes moving improves our chances of seeing the deer.

Swerving to avoid deer or other large herbivores can be problematic. They are capable of changing or reversing direction unexpectedly, or being caught in your headlight and freezing. There's no way of saying what they'll do if spooked by your bike.

This leaves braking as the evasion best bet in many cases. You've been [practicing emergency braking](#), you've slowed down, you're covering the brake and using your peripheral vision to try and spot moving deer. If you decide on braking as your default deer measure, you can cut the decision time. Covering the brakes cuts reaction time, and practicing emergency braking

improves your braking performance. [Slowing down](#) as little as 5 or 10 miles per hour also cuts vital feet from your braking distance, and more is better.

ET reports a deer near miss from 2009, when just a touch of the brakes slowed the bike enough to let the deer slip by just a foot or two in front of the bike. You don't necessarily have to be able to stop the bike to miss the deer.

Braking, even if you hit the deer, should reduce the impact. We have also heard from bikers in deer crashes who walked away, and attribute their survival to good [protective gear](#). As the most critical times for deer are dusk and dawn, even in summer it might be a good idea to stop and put on the best gear you have with you.

Conclusion

Deer crashes are common where bikers like to ride, in the countryside and on the twisties. There is no really good way of avoiding them. Extra vigilance and preparedness, knowing when and where to expect large herbivores, slowing down and being ready to brake hard seem like the best bet for avoiding and mitigating the dangers from deer. Personal protective gear in high-risk areas is a great idea.

Although deer and other large herbivores are the main animal killers of bikers, there are a number of other potential animal hazards out there.

Other Animal Crashes

[Deer](#) and other large herbivores are a responsible for the majority of motorcycle/animal crashes, but by no means the only problem.

Dogs

Dogs are carnivores, and act completely differently from deer.

Dogs can stray onto the road, and probably should be braked for in most cases, when in front of the bike. The strategy is similar to deer.

The most common problem with dogs seems to be in more rural areas, where good owners sometimes allow their animals to roam free. As predators, some dogs have an instinct to chase motorcycles. They are pretty good at estimating the closing speed of a bike, similar to fleeing prey. Hough recommends variations in speed to confuse the dog's closing speed calculations. Perhaps slow down a bit, let the dog fixate on you as a target, then speed up enough so the dog misses you. If the dog is really close, maybe just speed up.

In the case of a persistent bike-chasing dog, the dog will eventually figure out the slow-down, speed-up routine and get you.

Other large carnivores

I've seen panther signs in Florida, and there are mountain lions out West, and bears of varying ferociousness in many states. You don't often hear of bikers coming foul of these animals, but, as carnivores, a similar strategy to dogs might work. Most critters try to avoid humans, but give these guys a wide berth if you can.

Reptiles.

ET was once riding in a group led by a biker named Clone, in north Mississippi. Clone saw what he thought was a dead copperhead snake on the road, to his right, and, in the customary manner pointed the hazard with his right foot when passing.

The snake wasn't dead, and it struck at his boot, and then skittered along the road passing close by the other two riders in the group. The boot protected Clone's foot and Clone was uninjured.

The moral of that story is don't assume snakes are dead. They can strike at you as you pass, but boots are good protection. It might be a good idea to swerve around snakes if you can, and if you can choose the tail end to swerve towards, so much the better. If you think a snake might strike, remember that they are predators, so the dog strategy of slowing down and speeding up to put the animal off its aim might work.

Large Farm Animals.

In certain parts of the country, on small rural roads in cattle country, you might see things like cattle guards in the road or at side roads. You might also see cattle, sheep or other animals grazing freely and no fence between the road and the grazing land. You might even see dead animals by the road.

As herbivores, if they get on the road, they might act like deer, suggesting the deer strategy of observation, slowing down, covering the brakes in preparation for an emergency stop, and wearing all the protective gear you have with you.

Be prepared to meet a herd of sheep or cows being moved along the roadway. The drovers will generally let vehicles by, but be patient and let them do their thing. Sheep will take you down if you get among them.

Insects, venomous spiders and scorpions

There's nothing worse than getting a stinging insect under your visor or inside your jacket, but the major hassle from critters like this, while you are actually riding, is keeping your eye protection clear. Another good time to cover up and get the eye protection straight.

If you encounter swarming land crabs, figure out another route around them. They'll be there for a long time.

Small Critters

Small animals, like squirrels, cats, rabbits, rodents etc. sometimes dart across the road. They usually move very fast and don't give you much reaction time. The conventional wisdom for small critters of 5 lbs. or less is just to ride right over them. Swerving is problematic, as they move fast and can change direction unpredictably, and you'll probably be very close before you see them.

If you have religious scruples about killing critters, best bet would be to treat them like deer, i.e. try to emergency-stop.

There's usually no good way of predicting when small critters are around, unless you see others around. If you see a lot of squirrels, for instance, you might want to slow down and be extra vigilant. Same might be true of prairie dogs and the like.

Birds

Riders occasionally hit birds. There's no warning, no way to avoid them, and wearing good gear might be the best counter-measure.