

## Animal deaths spike on Sierra roads as drought hits habitat

By Peter Fimrite

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Motorists in the Sierra have been plowing into deer, bear and a variety of other large hoofed and pawed creatures in unprecedented numbers, according to state transportation and wildlife officials.

Bears and deer in particular have been loping across roads and highways this fall, apparently searching for scarce food, according to a rare joint public warning issued by Caltrans and the [California Department](#) of Fish and Wildlife.

“Motorists need to be on the lookout for animals on or near roadways, particularly deer and bears,” said [Charlton Bonham](#), director of the [Department of Fish and Wildlife](#). “It’s not only dangerous for the animals, but drivers and their passengers can be injured or killed if they hit — or swerve to miss — an animal.”

At least two dozen large animals were hit and killed in 23 separate incidents on Highway 50 and Interstate 80 between Nov. 14 and 19, a small sample of the grisly toll over the past few months, officials said.

Fourteen deer and four black bears, including a cub, were hit and killed in the six-day period on the two highways in Placer and El Dorado counties, according to California Highway Patrol and Caltrans statistics. Several unidentified animals and a dog or coyote were among the reported accidents. In one incident multiple dead animals were found in Placer County.

“It happens every season, but this year in particular has spiked,” said [Steve Nelson](#), the spokesman for Caltrans. Fortunately, no humans have been killed or seriously injured, he said.

The carnage is happening, wildlife managers say, because fires and drought have left huge swaths of the mountains bare, forcing large animals to roam farther and cross more roadways to find decent habitat.

“Because wildfires wipe out much of the vegetation, they have to search farther and wider for food, which isn’t as nutritious because of the drought,” said [Dana Michaels](#), a Fish and Wildlife spokeswoman. “Both factors make animals travel farther looking for food, increasing the likelihood of having to cross roads and highways.”

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that bears are bulking up in preparation for the winter and bucks are searching for mates during the fall rutting season, Michaels said.

“It seems like there have been more wildlife-human encounters all over the state this year,” Michaels said. “We’ve gotten more bear reports, and most people have heard about all the mountain lion reports. It just seems like the animals are being forced for a variety of reasons to be in areas where you don’t typically see so many, and naturally that would include roads.”

*Peter Fimrite is a [San Francisco Chronicle](#) staff writer. E-mail: [pfimrite@sfnchronicle.com](mailto:pfimrite@sfnchronicle.com) Twitter: [@pfimrite](#)*