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WILDLIFE!!

by Trudi Amundson, FAAST Representative

Do you often hear the phrase “Risk of Flying” and think of loss of engine or a scary landing or rough turbulence? But, probably not “Wildlife”! It would surprise many to learn that a high percentage of these types of accidents do occur on the runway. The FAA reports that incidents of wildlife hazards in the past century have accounted for billions of dollars in damage alone. Living in Minnesota makes the odds of a wildlife incursion a probability of higher proportion than we would like.

From 1990 – 2013 there were 1088 collisions with deer, elk, moose and caribou on airport runways according to the Federal Aviation Administration and the Department of Agriculture. Most of the planes suffered damaged and some were destroyed. Statics are one fatality, 29 injured and no mention of the fate of the animals.

The most common accident was with white-tailed deer. They are the smallest member of the North American deer family, but apparently big enough to wreck a plane. There were only about 350,000 of the creatures in the U.S. in 1900. By 1984 there were 15 million and by 2010 more than 28 million. They’ve caused \$44 million in aircraft damage and 238,000 hours of lost flying time over the past 24 years. About 30 percent of collisions occurred during the October-November mating season.

Did you know that deer seem to sense approaching winter storms and will gather together in wooded areas by airports. These areas are termed “deer yards.” In an effort to escape the extreme cold, they can wander onto heat-soaked runways and taxiway areas. Normally this occurs toward evening as they try to take advantage of the residual heat from these surfaces.

Deer react to such stimulants as being startled, hunger, or sex. Deer become most mobile during the rutting (mating) season which is triggered by the waning light of Fall. Depending on the geographical location of the airport, the rutting season may start as early as late September and end as late as mid-February in the Northern Hemisphere.

When Bucks seek mates, several may follow a single deer. A deer sighted during rutting season may indicate other Doe’s are nearby. If taking off on a runway and a deer appears, there maybe more behind that Doe.

BE ALERT especially living “up North”.....Deer become better acquainted and accustomed to people better than any other big game animal. Airport activity is NOT always sufficient to scare them off. AND remember, if a deer appears on the runway on final approach, you can ALWAYS GO AROUND!!