What are you doing to reduce animal accidents on the roads?

The number of animal accidents has reduced dramatically since the Verderers' records began. We cannot know for sure the reasons why this has happened, but have been working with the other Forest organisations to keep up efforts to reduce the number of accidents. In fact the average number of animals killed each year has halved since the 1990s. Despite the success in increasing the number of animals on the marking register to graze the New Forest, the proportion of those killed in accidents has fallen from 3% in some years in the 1990s to less than 1% today.

Despite the real progress in reducing accidents it is important to understand that each one is a tragedy for the commoner concerned. Hit-and-run accidents are a particular concern due to the needless additional suffering caused. Failing to report an accident, leaving an animal in unnecessary suffering is an offence under the Animal Welfare Act. Failure to report any accident involving livestock is also an offence under the Road Traffic Act.

The CDA and Verderers have funded a reward scheme for information that leads to the prosecution of drivers who hit and run, which we increased to £5,000 in 2017. This is a measure of how seriously we take these incidents.

The Verderers Higher Level Stewardship Scheme provides reflective collars suitable for ponies and donkeys free of charge, which helps to ensure that those successfully caught by their owners or on drifts are fitted with a collar, and lost or dirty ones replaced each year. Because they are designed to be safe if they catch on anything this does mean that they get lost, but the numbers with collars at any point in time is increasing. Evidence suggests that these do help, although they cannot be a complete solution.
Accidents requires driving that is appropriate to the conditions, including the presence of livestock on roads, their unpredictable behaviour and the level of visibility. In 2019 the Verderers began to make available reflective ear tags and reflective collars for cattle following successful trials.

Accidents peak around the evening commute and around the Autumn clock change, when more driving takes place in darkness. Our campaigns, therefore, concentrate on the Autumn, when we try to alert regular drivers to the higher risks they face. As everyone becomes oblivious to signs they see every day, we now have changing signs for the winter. In 2018 Hampshire County Council made these winter signs reflective, following the first experiment in 2017.

Since 2011 the CDA has also been pushing for improved signage at access points, and in 2018 Hampshire has extended the use of the surface-painted “running pony” warning triangle to busiest access points at the cattle grids. Hopefully the combination of the unusual signage and the rattle of the grid will remind drivers that they are entering a special landscape requiring special attention.

Contrary to popular myth most accidents occur on the 40mph routes heavily used by commuters, where the roads are straight and sightlines are good. This is shown by the map of accidents where the highest risk routes are shown in red and orange. Anyone familiar with reports of accidents will recall the most common spots for accidents, on straight roads where drivers are particularly confident in their safety.
Thank You

Commoners are very grateful to all those individuals and organisations who are working with us, and welcome new ideas for ways of helping people where grazing animals have right of way on the roads, and whose constant and widespread grazing is essential to keeping the New Forest so special and loved by millions.

Find out more

More data on animal accidents are available on the National Park Authority website – A couple are reproduced here.

We also have a leaflet offering practical advice to New Forest drivers.