

Don't let wildlife tangle with holiday decorations, yard objects

By Lynn Burton
Sopris Sun Staff Writer

Pedestrians headed north on Third Street near the library heard an unexpected "clomp, clomp, clomp" behind them last Friday afternoon. A split second later the sound identified itself in the form of a bounding deer who was last seen between the library's back porch and the Bridges Center heading west as fast as she could.

"Our dog barked and scared it," an out-of-breath

little boy dragging his coat backpack told this reporter. "He ran into the fence three times then jumped over."

On that note, the grade schooler continued his chase for a deer that by this time was probably half-way to Sopris Park and not looking back.

Deer are so common in and around Carbonale that many

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Jennifer Churchill
CPW spokeswoman

homeowners in River Valley Ranch enclose their trees in wire fencing to keep deer from eating them. Almost every evening, the deer creep down from the mesa overlooking RVR, saunter across Crystal Bridge Drive then commence to grazing in people's front yards and tiptoeing across their driveways.

To alert the public to the predicament deer sometimes find themselves in when encountering a civilization that continues to encroach on their turf, Colorado Parks and Wildlife issued the following press release.

Decorate safely

As the holiday season nears and decorations begin to adorn houses, yards and trees, Colorado Parks and Wildlife reminds the public to decorate with wildlife safety in mind. Outdoor holiday decorations and structures, like Christmas lights or trampolines, can cause problems for antlered animals.

"Deer, elk and moose often find themselves tangled in material or stuck in pools, skate parks, etc.," said Jennifer Churchill, public information officer for Colorado Parks and Wildlife. "Although some may find these interactions 'cute' or think that the animal is having fun, these situations can be very stressful to the animal. Coloradans should do all they can to prevent our wildlife from conflict with man made obstructions."

During the mating season, buck deer rub their antlers against just about anything. If they rub against something with holiday lights, there is a chance those lights



Colorado Parks and Wildlife reminds the public that deer spend most of their energy just surviving the winter without having to spend any of it untangling themselves from Christmas decorations and other yard objects. Photo by Lynn Burton

might end up adorning the animal's antlers.

Although it is difficult to predict exactly what deer are capable of snagging, homeowners can reduce the risk by anticipating problems before they happen.

Wildlife officers recommend attaching lights to the house or above the reach of deer in large trees. Stringing the lights in low shrubbery could end up endangering the animal.

"And it is not just Christmas lights," Churchill continued. "Cases of chicken wire, tomato cages, swing sets and hammocks tangled on antlers have been reported as well."

Objects tangled in antlers can stress the deer, causing it to spend time and energy trying to remove the object at the expense of feeding and resting. Sometimes a deer can free itself from the material, but most of the time the animal may have to wait until late winter when it naturally sheds its antlers and everything falls off. In extreme cases, where the objects pose life-threatening danger to the animal, Colorado Parks and Wildlife biologists may have to tranquilize it to remove the obstruction. Often times, capturing and handling the deer can be worse for

the animal than leaving it alone. Trying to immobilize a deer can be so stressful the deer dies.

Recommendations:

- Avoid draping lights over shrubs and bushes under five-feet high.
- Trees with trunk diameters of two-to-six inches are most likely to be rubbed by bucks and bulls, so only string lights on larger diameter trees.
- Use multiple short strands of wire plugged together versus one long strand so that if animals become entangled they will have less cord to deal with.
- Avoid stringing lights "clothesline" style across open areas.
- Firmly attach lights to tree limbs, gutters, or fence posts.
- Deer and elk can also benefit from the following: Take down volleyball nets, hammocks or other items; store water hoses, tomato cages and other garden materials until spring; put colorful flagging on empty clotheslines.