ABNORMAL DEER

Chances are fairly good that you see enough deer in your life, at some point you will stumble upon one that looks sick, deformed, or otherwise strange. These rare oddities can be shocking to witness, but most of the time they are not a cause for concern and don't require the attention of a biologist. The following are a few deer oddities that you may encounter in the wild, and how they might affect you.

Hair Loss

Deer shed and grow a new coat every late summer and early spring . They often look “scruffy” during this time, but the new coat is usually visible under the patchy remains of their previous coat. Patches of bare skin could indicate infestation with skin parasites such as lice or mites, but this is fairly rare.

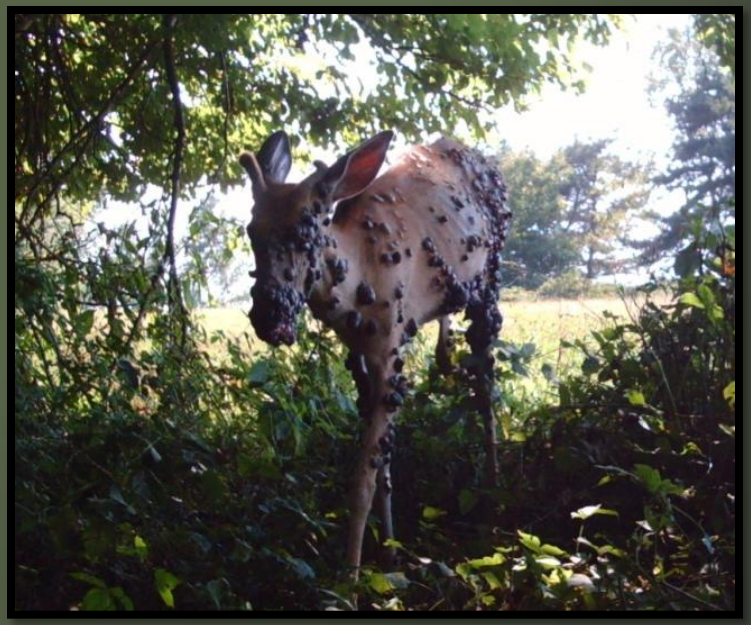
Abnormal Antlers

Genetics plays a significant role in the appearance of antlers, and random mutations or gene expression can cause a wide variety of strange growth forms. There are infinite variations possible, but none will affect the safety of the meat for human consumption.

Lumpy Jaw

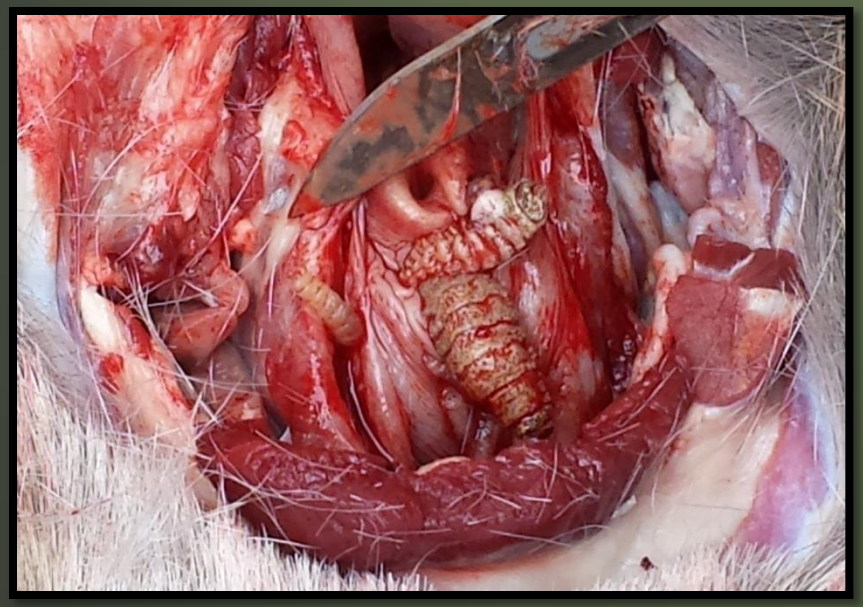
Some deer develop a large abscess on their jaw. Commonly known as “lumpy jaw,” there are several causes for this condition, including arterial worms, impacted food, and bacterial infection. No matter the cause, this single symptom is typically not fatal and will not affect the meat.

Cutaneous Fibroma



It is not uncommon to see a “warty” deer. Like warts in humans, these fibromas are caused by a virus, and are transmitted to deer by biting insects. Though unsightly, they only affect the skin and are usually completely harmless to the deer. Meat from a deer with fibromas is safe to consume.

Nasal Bots



Botflies in the genus *Cephenemyia* inhabit the throats of deer as part of their natural life cycle. The larvae may look disgusting, but they actually have very little impact on the deer, and zero impact on the quality of the venison.

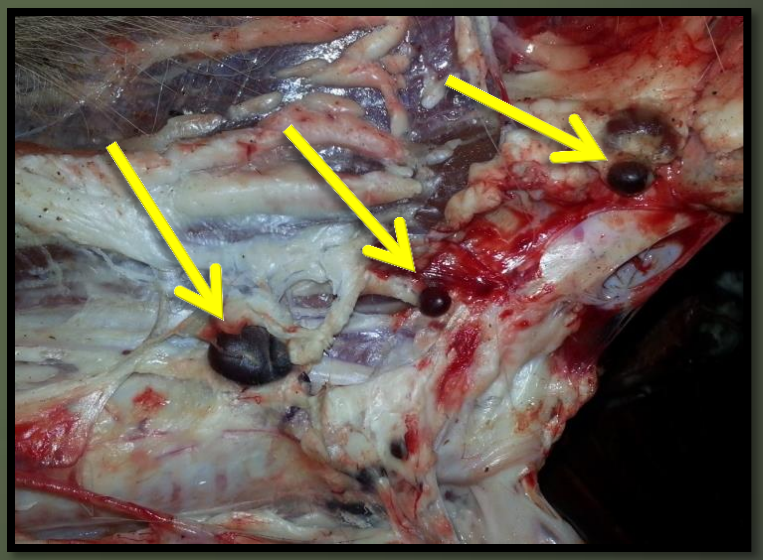
Foundering Hooves

Unusually long hooves are rare but can be caused by an overabundance of protein and carbohydrates in a deer's diet, such as those found in common deer baits. Some or all of the hooves may be affected. Deer with this condition are safe to eat.

Hydrocysts

Hydrocysts can be large and dramatic as in the picture above, or small and barely noticeable. They sometimes develop after a traumatic injury, when lymphatic fluid gets trapped and accumulates. Larger cysts can cause discomfort for the deer, but otherwise they are harmless and have no affect on meat quality.

Hemal Nodes



Hemal nodes, resembling black beans or sometimes a raw oyster, are part of the lymphatic system and can be found throughout a healthy deer's body. They are most commonly seen in the fatty tissue behind the shoulder blade. Even experienced hunters can be concerned upon finding their first hemal node, but they are completely normal.

Liver Flukes

This leech-like worm is sometimes found in deer livers, where it dwells in a dark, fluid-filled capsule. The flukes can cause substantial damage to the liver and eventually cause it to fail, but this is unusual. An infected liver should be well-cleaned before consumption, and care should be taken not to consume any flukes. Muscle meat will not be affected.

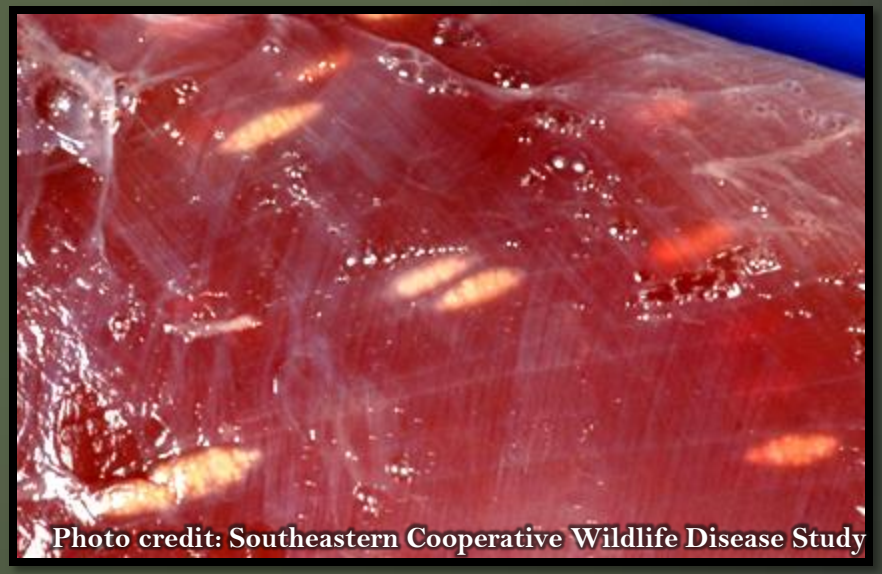
Large Lungworm

Large lungworms are fairly aggressive parasites that can reproduce quickly and cause health issues or death in deer. However, the parasite cannot infect humans and deer that have lungworm infestations are considered safe to eat.

Meningeal Worm

Deer are typically unharmed by meningeal worms , which reside in the brain tissue. Deer become infected after eating snails or slugs that contain the larvae, as part of the worm's natural life cycle. Infected deer are common and completely safe to consume.

Sarcocystis

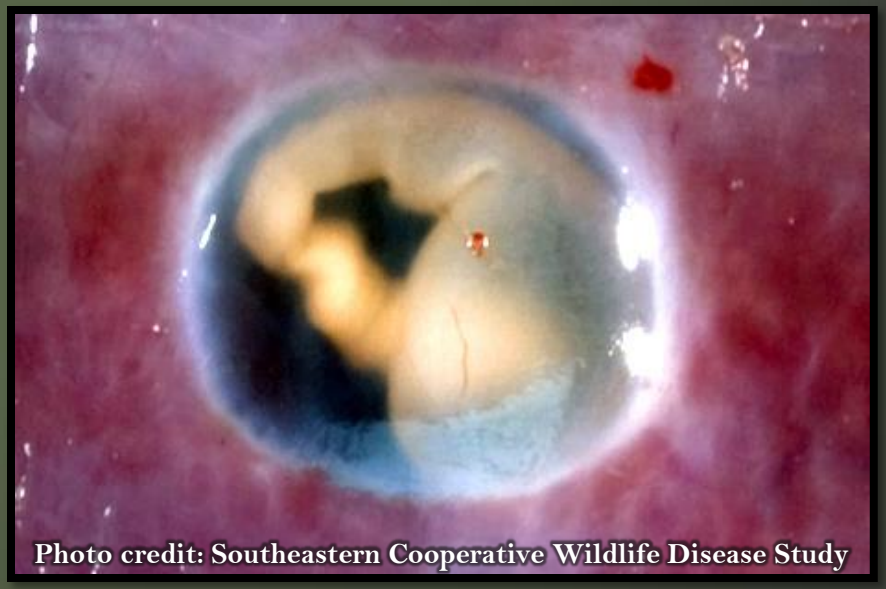


This common parasite is found in deer muscle tissue and resembles grains of rice. The effects of these parasites on humans are not completely understood, but there is no risk when the meat is cooked thoroughly. It is not recommended to feed the meat to dogs or cats, which are hosts for this parasite, though infection is typically harmless for them.

Abdominal Worm

Deer can become infected with abdominal worms by consuming the eggs as they browse. This worm roams freely in the abdominal cavity of a deer without causing any harm. The worms resemble pieces of spaghetti and are often found when field dressing. They cannot infect humans, and the deer meat is completely safe to consume.

Larval Tapeworm



Larval tapeworms can be found encapsulated on the surface of deer livers. Cooking an affected liver will kill any tapeworms, which can infect canines or felines , but not humans.

Escaped Exotic Species/ Tagged Deer

Captive exotic and native deer sometimes escape and can be seen wandering in the wild. Because exotics are not native species, they are not protected by state or federal wildlife laws. However, these and tagged white-tailed deer may be protected by property rights of the original owner. Conversely, escaped deer can pose health risks to the wild deer population. If you see a free-roaming exotic or tagged deer, please report it immediately to the DNR law enforcement hotline at 812-837-9536. You may be able to legally harvest the animal.

When Should I Contact a Biologist?

Some deer abnormalities are signs of contagious disease and are of interest to state biologists. Spread of some of these diseases could possibly become a health concern for humans. Contact the DNR if you see a deer with the following symptoms:

1. **Emaciation** paired with **heavy salivation or urination** (CWD)
2. Exhaustion, listlessness, not running when approached (CWD, EHD, or other sickness)
3. **Tan or yellow lumps** on the lungs or inside the rib cage (TB)
4. **Coughing**, nasal discharge, and **difficulty breathing** (TB)
5. Multiple dead deer with no apparent cause of mortality (EHD)
6. A dead deer with a swollen, **bluish tongue** and/or sores in the mouth (EHD)

Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD)

Bovine Tuberculosis (TB)

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)

For more information, please visit the IDNR wildlife disease page at
http://www.in.gov/dnr/fishwild/5466.htm