According to the United States Department of Transportation and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 1 million vertebrates run over every day in the U.S., a rate of one every 11.5 seconds. Roadkill statistics show that deer collisions account for 90 percent of animal-vehicle accidents, with 253,000 animal-vehicle accidents annually. The rate of one every 11.5 seconds is a testament to the frequency of these incidents.

Roadkill statistics:
- 4 million miles in the United States
- 226 million vehicles registered in the U.S.
- 253,000 animal-vehicle accidents annually
- 90 percent of animal-vehicle collisions involve deer
- 1 million vertebrates run over every day in the U.S., a rate of one every 11.5 seconds

According to the United States Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration:

Roadside eats

BY BLAISE HART-SCHMIDT

Along the country’s thousands of miles of roads lies a familiar phenomenon: a dead deer crossing the street. How many times have you seen a deer dead or injured by a passing car or truck? For many, these animals are dinner.

Philip Sandifer, area engineer with the Missouri Department of Conservation, said maintenance workers clean up roadkill when they see it on or near a roadway. Most of the time, these animals can be removed using a shovel, but other times they may need to be cleaned using equipment, such as a large brush or a skidsteer.

When someone calls the conservation department after hitting a deer, Sandifer says the first step is to determine if the animal is dead. If they don’t want it, the department has a list of families to call who might want it for food.

Sandifer and former Truman professor Eric Tumminia are no stranger to roadkill. The avid runner and cyclist said he often picks up animals during his runs, needing to clean them up to keep the road from becoming distracting.

For a long time I’ve been fascinated with animals, like a kid of people, and that’s just sort of extended to finding animals on the side of the road and being curious about them,” he said. “It may be a little bit selfish, but when they’re dead they can’t run off and you can look at them and climb close to them.”

Tumminia said that in the beginning, finding and collecting roadkill had a survival aspect. But as research and social ideology took shape, it was important to base this off what was available to him and what he could afford to wear gloves when handling the carcasses of animals. If the temperature is above 40 degrees and the person didn’t clean them, it may be better to eat the meat. If it’s below 40 degrees, it’s better to clean them and freeze them.

“Roadkill is readily available throughout the country. It’s the most viable non-traditional protein source that you can get, and it’s readily available and cheap,” he said.

Tumminia’s list of roadkill includes rabbit, squirrel, — and — his most unusual meal — behind-hearse turf of Kirksville by Highway 11.

The state biologist had a beautiful coat, which Tumminia skinned while listening to cicadas and interesting news. “It was a little rubbery I would say, which is not really palatable, but it’s a meal. I would like to try it again.”

“The idea is you are what you eat. I would prefer to be a bobcat, if I am what I eat, than a Big Mac.”

Because of the origin of the animals, Tumminia said it’s important to be cautious when collecting and preparing the meat. If the animal’s eyes are already dead when it is dropped under the hood of the car, the meat is damaged. Also, if the meat is damaged it should not be eaten.

Fur covers the same stretch of road once a day will guarantee meat if fresh, he said. If an animal isn’t there one day but is the next, it’s not going to be fresh.

But not everyone is on board with eating roadkill. Sam Wilson, an environmental public health specialist, has a different stance on roadkill: “Don’t eat it.”

Bacteria grow in the meat stemming from going too long without refrigeration, causing food safety problems. Wilson recommended setting meat away from any other meat. The meat should be stored at about 40 degrees and the person shouldn’t handle it on the hands.

“To eat anything you don’t know the background on and you don’t know how long it’s been dead and why it’s dead, it wouldn’t be safe to eat it,” he said.

Tumminia continues to eat roadkill: “Roadkill is readily available throughout the country and I would say it’s much of the United States,” he said. “I’m not sure how often I collect it, I identify good eating roadkill, I don’t eat all of it, and I’m not sure it’s a good idea.”

Roadkill is a familiar sight on highways and back roads. People who come across roadkill can’t help but look, and many will try to picture what it might look like. The remains of a cat and an opossum lie on the side of Kirksville streets. Some health experts advise against eating roadkill, but alumni and former Truman professor Eric Tumminia said it’s a good source of lean protein and a free and environmentally friendly alternative to industrially produced meats.

Squirrel Pot Pie

1/3 cup vinegar
1-2 tbsp. crushed red pepper (to taste)
1 1/2 tsp. garlic powder
1 cup oil
1/3 cup sesame seed

Shake all ingredients except venison and bacon in a small jar. Cut venison in mixture for several hours. Wrap a small slice of bacon around approximately 1 pound of venison into small bite-size chunks. Marinate venison for a few hours. Bake bacon on the lowest rack from heat and then move closer to heat to crisp the venison.

Clean the squirrel before cutting it into serving pieces. Put squirrel into a large pot with 1 1/2 tsp. salt, 2 1/2 cups water, 1 tbsp. butter, a dash of black pepper. Boil the squirrel for 12 minutes. Do not lift cover during cooking. Place squirrel in a baking pan. Lay the rolled dumplings over the top of squirrel, cover tightly and simmer until very tender (2-3 hours). The meat should be almost ready to be served. A little fresh chopped parsley may be added to the gravy over squirrel and dumplings. A little gravy over squirrel and dumplings. A little fresh chopped parsley may be added to the gravy over squirrel and dumplings.