



British Columbia Conservation Foundation
Wildlife Collision Prevention Program
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Frequently Asked Questions about Wildlife Vehicle Collisions

What can drivers do to reduce the chances of having a wildlife vehicle collision?

Watch for the signs - A Wildlife Warning Sign is a yellow diamond shaped sign with an animal symbol in it. The sign warns of a hazard ahead, and advises drivers to be cautious. The sign does not require speed reduction, unless there is an adjacent speed limit sign. Drivers must obey wildlife warning signs and any associated speed changes. Drivers must not disregard the signs just because they have been seen before.

Reduce speed - Speed is a common factor in collisions. Speed reduces a driver's ability to steer away from a hazard. Some studies suggest that wildlife-vehicle collisions occur more than expected on clear, dry nights, and on long straight stretches, as drivers tend to increase speed under good conditions. Drivers may be more cautious on curves or in poor weather.

Drive defensively - Drivers and passengers should actively watch for wildlife, movement, or shining eyes on and beside the road. Drivers should be cautious between dusk and dawn. Light levels are low, and animals are active. Animals approaching from the right side seem to be avoided more successfully than animals approaching from the left, as headlights illuminate that portion of the road better, and drivers pay close attention to the right hand side of the road and ditch - so pay equal attention to both sides of the road.

NOTE: Moose are difficult to see at night because their fur is very dark, and they are so tall that their eyes are normally above most headlight beams, and therefore their eyes may not reflect the headlights.

Use your vehicle - Drivers should keep headlights, signal lights, tail lights and windshields clean, and wear a seatbelt at all times. Drivers can honk horns or flash lights to scare animals off the road. In a 3-lane situation, where possible, drive in the middle lane to provide more distance from the ditch. At night, use the high beams of the vehicle in front to extend the effective sight distance.

What should drivers do if they encounter wildlife on the road? Slow down - collision avoidance and driver response time are improved at slower speeds. Anticipate unpredictable behaviour from all wildlife. Some animals travel together so where there is one animal, there may be more. Watch for mother/offspring pairs.

What should drivers do if a crash is inevitable? - Sometimes, there is no real choice except to strike the animal. If this is the case, look where you want to go, not at the animal. The vehicle tends to go where you look. Brake firmly and quickly, then look, and steer your vehicle to strike the animal at an angle. Let up on the brake just before you hit the animal. This causes the front end of your vehicle to rise and reduces the chances of the animal coming through your windshield.

What should drivers do if an animal is hit, or if there is a dead animal beside the road? This depends on road and traffic conditions, and the condition of the driver. Pull off the road. Turn on hazard lights. Stay away from wounded animals, as they can be very dangerous. You are not required to put an injured animal out of its misery or move a dead animal. Inspect your vehicle to see if it safe to continue driving. Call the RCMP if there is damage over \$1000 or any human injuries. Call the Conservation Officer Service if there is a dead or injured animal to report. In BC, call 1.877.952.7277. In AB, call 1.800 642.3800. In a National Park, contact the Park Wardens. Reporting the exact location of collisions helps wardens monitor injured animals and recover dead ones. Quick removal prevents other animals from being attracted to the highway. Report vehicle damage to your insurance company.

For more information, or to make a tax deductible donation, go to www.wildlifecollisions.ca



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Steer clear - to swerve or not to swerve? - If smaller animals such as deer are in your way - think carefully, and consider using your brakes, not your wheel. Do not take unsafe evasive actions. Serious collisions can occur when drivers lose control of their vehicles trying to avoid an animal.

Where do collisions with wildlife most often occur? - Studies indicate that there are some common characteristics of high-risk locations. These include areas of good roadside habitat with water nearby; where creeks intersect roads; and long, wide, straight stretches of road. One assumption is that on good road conditions (long, wide and straight) motorists tend to feel safer and more confident, and therefore accelerate.

Can collisions occur in the city? - The risk of having a collision is not restricted to rural roads or highways. Wildlife is present in urban settings. Roads that connect outlying sections of a city with more populated downtown areas are high risk.

When are collisions with wildlife most common? – Collisions can occur anytime, but there are peak times when they are most likely. 40% of collisions occur between 7:00 pm and midnight. 80% of all wildlife collisions involve deer and the high-risk time times are May and November. Spring is particularly high-risk as new green forage in roadside ditches attracts animals. Bear collisions peak in September and October as bears forage closer to communities. December and January are the high-risk times for moose collisions.

What do drivers need to know about wildlife behaviour in order to anticipate hazards? - Animal behaviour is related to the "fight-or-flight response". There is a certain amount of space in which an animal feels safe; but once that boundary is violated, the animal's reaction is unpredictable. Even if an animal sees you, it may still jump in front of your vehicle. Some animals travel together, for example deer, bighorn sheep, and mother/offspring pairs. If one animal crosses the road, others may follow. If an animal has crossed the road, it may turn and cross again. Animals standing calmly at the side of the road may bolt unexpectedly.

Is wildlife is attracted to the road? - People think of the road as a dangerous place, but wildlife may actually be attracted to the road and right of way. Roadside forage and application of road salt attracts wildlife. In the winter, ploughed roads offer easier movement. In the summer, increased wind provides relief from biting insects.

Why do deer swerve in front of the vehicle? – In an attempt to avoid predators, deer run in a twisting or dodging motion. That is why deer may make a sudden swerve right in front of a vehicle - that is how they are "programmed" to respond to a threat.

Are deer whistles effective? - Many people are convinced that the deer whistles installed in their vehicles are effective at scaring wildlife off the road, however, independent scientific research disagrees. There are two types of deer whistles – air driven and battery operated. Air driven whistles emit sound at frequencies that deer cannot hear, and the noise is not loud enough to be heard over traffic noise. Battery operated whistles have not been independently tested.

Are reflectors effective? - Reflectors are prisms mounted on posts along the road side. As headlights strike the reflectors, light is reflected towards the road. This reflected light catches the animal's eye and distracts it from crossing. There are conflicting research results. Wildlife habituation to the light, the most effective colour, and daytime effectiveness all require further study.

Does fencing work? – With proper maintenance, fences can virtually eliminate collisions. However, there are strong biological arguments against extensive fencing. Traditional wildlife movement corridors are interrupted and wildlife habitat is fragmented. Fencing is also an expensive method of collision mitigation.

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