



Urban Wildlife Issues
Wildlife Rescue column by Nicky Fried
as appearing in the *Burnaby NOW*

Cars cause serious hurt to little animals

I'm all shook up. Not because I saw Elvis last week. But because I was involved in a car accident.

Thank you for asking: I'm fine and very grateful that the children were not in the car at the time. However, it was a nerve-wracking experience.

I can only imagine what it must be like for a bird or animal colliding with a vehicle without the protection of all the metal that goes to make up an automobile.

Last year, 572 of our patients at the Wildlife Rescue Association of B.C. were involved with car collisions. That's close to 20 per cent of our caseload. Roads are an integral part of our way of life, so it's hardly surprising that they are a factor in wildlife injuries. We need roads for a variety of very positive reasons: to transport food, to get people to hospitals, to get to and from work and so on.

Unfortunately animal encounters with our roads are not always positive.

The squirrel, for all its agility and lightness, is all too often a roadside casualty. The squirrel's natural defence is to sprint and then change direction in the blink of an eye. This predator-evasion behaviour was developed over millions of years and until recently has been very effective.

Unfortunately, it does not work when the danger is a stream of traffic headed in both directions.

Herons like to hang out near roads. The ditches alongside roads are often a good source of food.

Raptors too are drawn to hunt in the grassy medians and ditches adjacent to highways. They have an open view and can see a rodent for miles.

Unfortunately, they become so focused on their prey that they don't pay enough attention to oncoming cars.

Life's no picnic for the critters in the ditches either. Jackie, a team leader at WRA, says she once counted 50 dead frogs on a one-kilometre side road into work. I guess they

like to sun themselves on the warm asphalt. Turtles often breed beside roads and, when the young are born, they have to fight the forces of nature and deal with our roads. In some jurisdictions, caring humans build culverts under the road so that the animals cross undisturbed.

Nocturnal animals are also at risk. They come out to forage just as we are getting into our cars and heading home from work. Lots of cars on the roads and decreased visibility - a recipe for disaster. The raccoon, which is so well adapted to the urban environment that it is now more populous in urban centres than rural areas, is often a nighttime casualty.

All we see at night are the glowing, eyes and by then it's too late.

We hear a great deal about deer being hit by cars, probably because it presents a significant danger to the motorist. In reality, deer are not hit as often as you would imagine. When they are hit, they are poor candidates for rehabilitation. The trauma is often too great.

Spring is a busy time of year in the wild world.

Birds and animals are seeking out mates, foraging for food and looking for homes for spring babies. Birds and animals can be confused by our world, so it's a good idea to be aware and help our wild friends. Here are some suggestions on how you can help prevent accidents and keep wildlife and your family safe.

- Be attentive and scan the roads as you drive.
- Pay attention to wildlife warnings posted on roads. Keep in mind that some species, like deer, travel in groups.
- Be especially alert at dawn and dusk when animals are more active.
- Drive slower, especially at night. If you slow down, you have more time to avoid hitting wildlife. Lower your dashboard lights at night so you can see the reflection of your headlights in the eyes of animals near the road.
- Watch for wildlife on roads that are bordered by natural habitat, agricultural fields or forested woods.
- Don't litter, as it attracts wildlife.