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[Wildlife-Vehicle Collisions--Renee Seidler and Amanda Hardy--Wildlife Conservation Society](#)

Imagine crossing a four-lane interstate on foot to get groceries, go on a date, or take your children to school – with no bridge, crosswalk, stoplights, or police to slow drivers down. You climb over cement barriers or guardrails, watch for a gap in the rushing stream of cars, then dart to the other side. Many wild animals make this daily or seasonal dash across roads – if they aren't hit.

In 2008, a Wildlife Vehicle Collision Reduction Study done for Congress found that 1 in 20 of all reported motor vehicle collisions is animal-related—that's five percent of all crashes. Annually that translates into about 26,000 injuries, 200 human deaths, and an \$8.3 billion price tag from colliding with animals.

It's difficult to quantify the full impact of vehicle collisions on wildlife populations because most incidents that get reported involve larger animals like deer and elk. The toll on animals such as squirrels, porcupines, fox, and birds goes largely uncounted. Some guess that as many as 1 billion animals, large and small, may be dying every year on American roads.

So how can we prevent animals and drivers from colliding on our respective travel routes? Motorists can increase awareness of risk and adapt driving behaviors to decrease the chance of a collision with an animal. Research shows that drivers who anticipate risk can move their foot to the brake pedal faster and reduce the chances of a collision.

Spring and fall are peak risk periods when animals are migrating, searching for mates, or evading hunters. Many animals, including elk and mule deer, are active in early morning and evening when twilight reduces the chance of being seen by predators. Unfortunately, drivers also have a hard time seeing animals at these times. As a result, more collisions take place at dawn and dusk. The period after the fall Daylight Saving Time transition is especially hazardous for drivers and animals. Wildlife mortalities on roads can increase before animals have an opportunity to adjust to the new peak traffic times.

Most collisions with animals occur on two-lane highways with relatively low traffic volumes (fewer than 5,000 vehicles /day) on straight stretches in dry conditions where drivers may pay less attention and drive faster than they would on, say, curvy, wet roads where the perception of risk is greater. We're all familiar with road signs for animal crossings that warn us of this potential hazard on these stretches of road, such as the dynamic message signs provided by Jackson Hole Wildlife Foundation; but when drivers fail to see the wildlife they have been warned of, they can become complacent and often dismiss the risk altogether. In order to increase effectiveness, JHWF shifts their signs around the valley, emphasizing the unpredictability of wildlife on the road.

Warning signs rely on changing driver behavior; not an easy feat. Altering animal behavior may seem harder, but this approach is quite promising. The most effective tactics harness engineering solutions to guide animal movements. They use fencing to prevent wildlife access to roads while guiding them toward structures that cross over or under roads.

In Wyoming, pronghorn following their 6,000-year-old migration route – the “Path of the Pronghorn” -- are guided by fences to overpasses and underpasses that span a highway that lies between their summer and winter ranges. Without these structures, drivers risk collisions with these 140-pound horned animals as thousands of pronghorn cross the highway during their twice-yearly migrations.



When the construction was completed in the fall of 2012, we watched the pronghorns' initial crossing attempts in painful suspense. The animals ran toward the guide fences, trying to get through, seemingly unaware of the open overpass nearby. In time, every group of pronghorn eventually found the overpass and crossed over the busy highway. The instinct to reach their winter range exceeded their fear of these new, unknown structures. The fencing and crossing structures have now become a new constituent of their migration path.



In time, the savings made by avoiding the costs of collisions with animals will offset the \$9.7 million invested in these structures. Given the reduced rate of collisions that has been documented since their installation, they are anticipated to pay themselves off in about 12 years. And the value of conserving one of the last remaining intact long-distance terrestrial migration corridors is immeasurable.

The autumnal wildlife wanderlust ensues, contributing to the annual peak in collisions with wildlife. Slow down and pay attention when and where the possibility of encountering wildlife is highest. Drivers ultimately bear the responsibility of avoiding wildlife collisions.

(Editor's note: This article has been abridged from an Op-Ed piece in *The New York Times*, Oct. 24; photos above by F. Clark and R. Seidler)

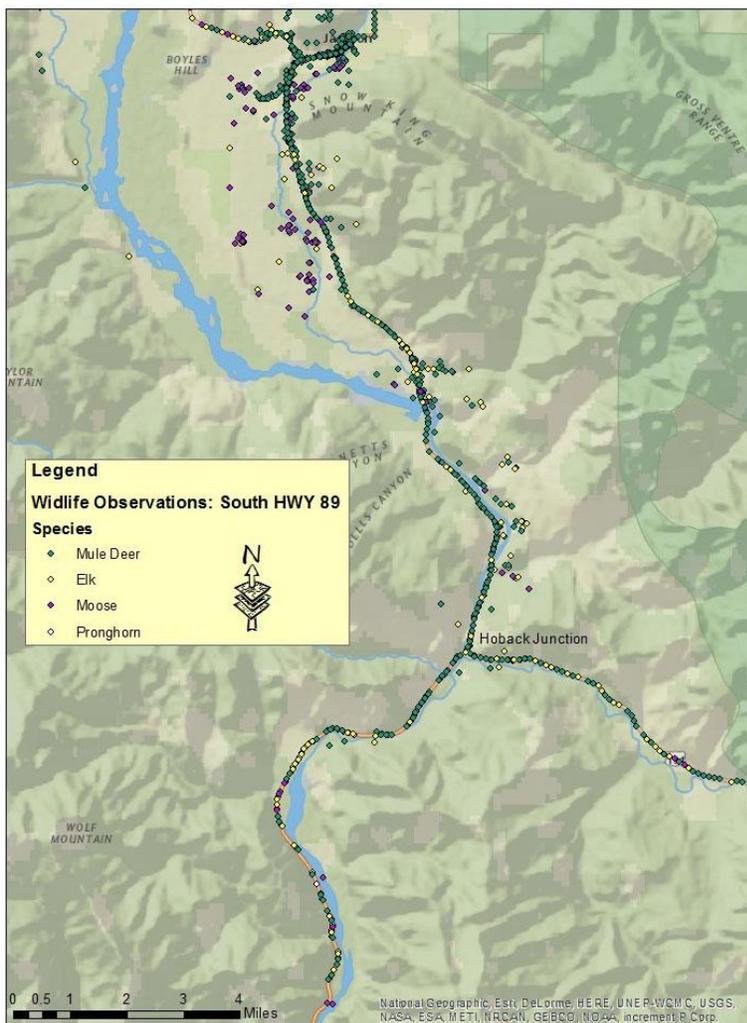
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[Help gather data for HWY 89 South wildlife crossings--Cory Hatch](#)

The Jackson Hole Wildlife Foundation is asking Nature Mappers to watch for wildlife on Highway 89 South as Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT) prepares to build wildlife crossing structures on the stretch of road.

The wildlife crossings are part of a larger construction project that will widen Highway 89 South to five lanes in some locations. The project is expected to begin in summer of 2015 with landslide mitigation just north of Hoback Junction. Work on the wildlife crossings could begin in 2017.

WYDOT currently plans to build five crossings along the road as well as two aquatic species crossings at Game Creek and Horse Creek. The aquatic crossings could also accommodate small mammals. Local conservation groups are working with WYDOT to see if a sixth crossing structure is possible. Three of the planned crossings will be incorporated into highway bridges; engineers will design the bridges with expanded abutments to allow wildlife to move under the bridges unimpeded. Much of the corridor will also include funnel fencing to direct wildlife to the crossings and keep them off the road.



The Jackson Hole Wildlife Foundation, the Greater Yellowstone Coalition and the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance hope to coordinate with WYDOT to place trail cameras at the crossing locations in order to gather baseline information about wildlife movements. In the meantime, wildlife observations gathered by Nature Mapping volunteers could help researchers learn more about what types of animals use the road corridor and when and where they cross the road.

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Map: Current Data along Highway 89 South

This map represents data submitted by both Nature Mappers (1,700 entries) and Wyoming Department of Transportation (1,500 entries). Data include mule deer, elk, pronghorn and moose both alive and, unfortunately, killed. It is clear that the area south of Jackson is vital wildlife habitat and movement corridors. Please add your observations as WYDOT builds new road crossings. (See article above.)

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Volunteer Spotlight – Haberfelds: Backyard Family Team – Frances

Clark

Tucked into the north side of Boyles Hill, Louise, Ralph, and Susie Haberfeld are dedicated Backyard Project Nature Mappers. Living on the edge of a conifer-clad slope and a rolling aspen grove, they see a wonderful array of species from all corners of their home. Louise looks out the living room windows, Ralph from his office, and Susie from “downstairs.” They keep binoculars handy and maintain a central list in the kitchen. They have submitted over 2,500 observations.



Louise and Ralph moved to Jackson 10 years ago for the birds, wildlife, and scenery. Upon retiring, they wanted to live near a national park. “You can’t do better than Grand Teton,” says Ralph.

Upon arrival, Ralph wandered around his new neighborhood birdwatching and met Doug Wachob at the Teton Science Schools' research office on the south side of Boyles Hill. Doug recommended that Louise and Ralph volunteer with the JH Wildlife Foundation and attend JH Bird Club meetings. Between the two organizations, the newcomers learned about Nature Mapping and were among the first trained by Chuck Schneebeck, a founder of Nature Mapping.



Their daughter, Susie, has since joined with her parents. From the age of 8, Susie was a back-seat naturalist, always with a bird or animal book in hand during long family drives from California to Yellowstone National Park. She focuses on bird observations. (Saw-whet owl to left)

During our interview, the three family members shared different thoughts. Susie said that Ralph “does chipmunks.” Indeed, Ralph is trying to track the least chipmunks' first emergence and last appearance for the year. They also watch carefully the annual cycles of violet-green and tree sparrows and note regularly bats, house wrens, and elk (some which they recognize individually). However, they missed “their” moose on Moose Day—it browsed just beyond their assigned territory.

Asked if he has a favorite animal, Ralph replied, “I love them all the same.”

Ralph says they want to keep tracking the common species. “There are more magpies than moose, yet each month Nature Mappers submit more moose observations than common ravens or magpies.”

The Haberfeld team has seen also some unusual to rare species. They have spotted pine martens feeding, three long-tailed weasels playing, Nashville warbler's nesting, and rare Cordilleran flycatchers hawking mosquitoes. ("We were quizzed by Sue Patla of Wyoming Game and Fish on this flycatcher two years ago. This year we took photos to prove the ID"). (photo right.) They try hard to be accurate. "We see chickadees all the time tucked into the trees, but we aren't always sure if they are black-capped or mountain, so we have to leave some out."



"We are a bit competitive sometimes," admits Susie, with a smile. "I saw a raccoon last night, which they haven't."

Why do they Nature Map? Louise says, "We started so we could learn how to ID the birds in the Valley, and I am an inveterate list-maker. I like to go back over the list and review what we saw months or years ago. I want to help scientists understand how the species' populations vary. By doing Nature Mapping consistently in our backyard we will have consistent data over time."



Ralph adds in, "Nature Mapping is fun and it heightens my awareness of looking."

For Susie, "I enjoy seeing the animals, and yet I don't want to be the only one who knows where they are. I get to share my observations and help researchers."

In the end, Louise does all the data entry (Ralph says he can't remember his password). "I can have 5-6 pages of observations, maybe 2 months worth, before I enter them. Our internet is very slow which is extremely frustrating; but, eventually I will record them all!"

We thank the Haberfelds for their dedication to the Nature Mapping program and to the wildlife of Jackson Hole. As Ralph says, "We don't want to live in a world without wildlife."

(Photos by the Haberfelds)

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September 2014 Data - Paul Hood

As of September, Nature Mappers have surpassed a milestone of 30,000 observations, a significant accomplishment for citizen scientists. Please know that your efforts are contributing to the understanding, appreciation, and protection of our wildlife throughout Jackson Hole Thank you. And keep on mapping...onto 35,000!

Total Observers: 22 **Most Observations:** Julie Deardorff (68) and Susan Marsh (43)

Mammals: 118 observations 11 species 361 individuals

Birds: 90 observations 44 species 266 individuals

Amphibians: 1 observations 1 species 1 individuals

Snakes: 3 observation 2 species 3 individuals

Total: 212 observations 58 species 631 individuals

Projects: Backyard - 98, Casual Observations - 114

Notes: A wandering garter snake and a tiger salamander slithered into view along with appearances of a mountain lion, a couple of porcupines, and a badger. Wilson's snipe and owls: barred, great gray, and great horned--were also outstanding observations in September.

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Calendar

Tuesday, October 28, 6 p.m. - "Biodiversity: What it is and how to measure it"- Teton County Library - Mike Merigiano, Ph.D., will show ways to measure ecological diversity and how these methods can be used to aid management of natural areas. Wyoming Native Plant Society – Teton Chapter: <http://tetonplants.wordpress.com/>



Friday, November 14, 6:00 p.m. -"Tracking the Wild Curlew" – Teton County Library - Long-billed Curlew populations have declined in portions of their breeding range. While we can identify many threats on their breeding grounds, it is critical to know where they go throughout the year. Since spring 2013, Dr. Jay Carlisle and partners have been deploying satellite transmitters on a sampling of adults from ID, MT, WY, including one from here in Jackson Hole. Find out where they go and concerns for their future. Dr. Carlisle's research interests are conservation of migratory birds in the Intermountain West.-- Sponsored by JH Bird and Nature Club.

Tuesday, November 24, 6:00 p.m. - Plant movie night - Teton County Library - Two days before Thanksgiving is a great time to relax in good company and enjoy a movie about plants and eat popcorn.Movie to be selected– Wyoming Native Plant Society – Teton Chapter: <http://tetonplants.wordpress.com/>

Thursday, December 4 - Jackson Hole Wildlife Symposium: Toward a Resilient Future - Presented by Teton Research Institute and Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative. Learn about the latest wildlife research from local and regional scientists and experts. Share and discuss the challenges facing wildlife and the environment in Jackson Hole and the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Jackson Campus of Teton Science Schools. More information: <http://www.tetonscience.org/teton-research-institute/jhws>

Saturday, Dec 20, Christmas Bird Count – Save the date for this traditional country-wide, citizen science endeavor. More info to come. JH coordinator: Susan Marsh: 733-5744.
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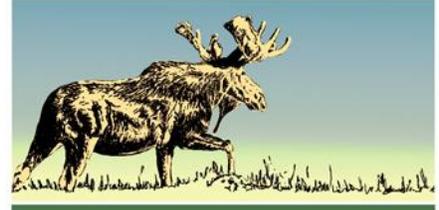
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