

Road safety campaign urges motorists to be alert on Victorian roads – a safe drive saves our wildlife

Wildlife Victoria, the State's wildlife emergency rescue service, is urging drivers to take extra care on the roads this summer. Every year thousands of native animals are killed on Victorian roads.

The not for profit organisation is anticipating a deadly summer of road trauma for native animals, with more holiday makers taking to unfamiliar roads after the easing of COVID-19 restrictions.

In partnership with TAC and Yarra Trams and with the pro bono support of major media outlets, Wildlife Victoria's campaign reminds us that a safe drive saves our wildlife.

Wildlife Victoria CEO Lisa Palma said that our wildlife are particularly vulnerable this summer. "With so much of their habitat destroyed during bushfires, we expect to see more animals foraging for food on roadside verges. This applies to both country roads and in other areas where wildlife is active such as the outer, newer suburbs of cities and towns," she said.

Many Victorians and interstate visitors may be venturing on a road trip for the first time. Some people would be unaware that the period between dusk and dawn is a particularly dangerous time to be on the road, because much of our wildlife is venturing out at these times in search of food.

"So many native animals' lives were lost in the horrific bushfires last summer. Those that survived are just getting back on their feet. We need everyone to look out for them. Especially in country Victoria, we are asking drivers to remember you are driving on more than just a road. You are driving through the home of our wildlife. And it is your responsibility to drive safely to protect them," Ms Palma said.

Wildlife on roads is a huge safety concern for drivers and passengers. Animal collisions account for around 5-6% of road accidents and it is thought that this is under-reported. Of the accidents that resulted in serious injury for the driver/rider, more than half involved motorcyclists.

Hitting a large animal such as a kangaroo or wombat while travelling at speed can result in injuries to passengers and cause major damage to the vehicle. In most cases the animal does not survive or is severely injured and must be euthanised.

Roadkill impacts the Australian environment by wiping out more than four million mammals and six million birds, reptiles and other creatures a year. Kangaroos, wombats, wallabies and emus are most at risk on our roads, but drivers are also asked to look out for birds, possums, lizards and echidnas while driving.

While in many cases an accidental collision may be unavoidable, drivers can keep themselves and our native wildlife safe, by being alert and aware and reducing speed. (*See a full list of recommendations on how to avoid a collision on the next page*).

Reducing speed reduces the risk of all types of collisions, including hitting animals on the road, so drivers are urged to slow down in areas where wildlife is active. A driver can reduce the likelihood of a road accident by 20% by simply reducing 10km per hour off their speed.

Ms Palma said Wildlife Victoria's road safety campaign would not have been possible without significant support from TAC, Yarra Trams and the many media outlets who had provided advertising space at no cost to Wildlife Victoria.

Campaign supporters include: TAC, Yarra Trams, Vic Roads, MEDIACOM, Network Ten, Southern Cross Austereo, Nine Network, Seven Network, WIN Network, 3AW, TRSN, Joy FM, Spots and Spaces, Croc Media, ARN, Val Morgan, Nova 100, ATN, The Media Shop, VMO Outdoor, oOh! Media, QMS, Shopper Media, JC Decaux, MediaBanc, Herald Sun, Geelong Advertiser, Weekly Times, Regional Media Connect, ACM, BOFB and Nine Publishing.

"In addition to this amazing support, SBS Radio have translated the campaign into 15 languages, allowing us to deliver this road safety message even more widely across our diverse Victorian community," Ms Palma said.

More details are available on our website at www.wildlifevictoria.org.au/drive-safely

How to avoid a collision

- Stay alert and drive carefully through the home of our wildlife. If you know you are in an area where there is wildlife, stay focused on the road. Be aware that wildlife may be grazing on the roadside.
- Reduce speed so that you can increase your reaction time, should wildlife come onto the road.
- Be especially careful driving between dusk and dawn. This is a very dangerous time to be driving. Much of Australia's wildlife will be out at night in search of food.
- Take care when leaving new housing estates that are situated near native habitat. Many of the wildlife related road accidents reported to Wildlife Victoria happen in areas where humans and animals are sharing nearby living spaces.
- Pay attention to yellow road signs that indicate wildlife in the area.
- If you see an animal near the road, slow down, and prepare to brake if needed.
- If you are driving at night in rural areas, use your high beam headlights for better sight, and watch for reflecting eyes.
- Take it extra slow when road visibility is poor.
- Be aware of smaller animals such as birds, echidnas, possums and reptiles.

What to do if you have a collision

- If you do have a wildlife collision, pull over to a safe spot, put on your hazard lights and check to make sure everyone in your vehicle is safe.
- Take note of the street address or nearby landmarks to enable emergency support workers to find the location.
- If anyone is injured call an ambulance on '000'.
- Telephone Wildlife Victoria's Emergency Response Service on (03) 8400 7300, or you can lodge a report via the Wildlife Victoria website www.wildlifevictoria.org.au or via the Snap Send Solve app to get help for the animal. Even if the animal appears to be unharmed and has hopped or moved away, it will be injured.
- Wildlife Victoria's emergency response service can help. Volunteer rescuers can be dispatched to check the animal's condition
- A life-saving pouch check is so important. If the animal is deceased or injured there may be a joey in its pouch that has survived the impact. A joey can survive in a pouch for several days after its mother has died. Alternatively, the joey may have left its mother's pouch but still be nearby.
- If the animal is deceased and on the road, please take time to move it to the side of the road (if safe to do so). By doing this, you are removing the hazard for other drivers and ensuring that other animals will not be injured while feeding on the carcass.

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About Wildlife Victoria

- Wildlife Victoria is a not for profit wildlife Emergency Response Service that has been operating for more than 30 years as an independent, not-for-profit organisation focussed on the welfare of Australia's unique wildlife.
- Annually, Wildlife Victoria's Emergency Response Service receives more than 88,000 requests for assistance and assists over 50,000 sick, injured or orphaned animals.
- Wildlife Victoria educates the community about wildlife, and helps the community manage wildlife incidents.
- Wildlife Victoria advocates for wildlife whenever their welfare is under threat or compromised.
- More than 10,000 people and 153 organisations in the past four years have accessed outreach education activities run by Wildlife Victoria volunteers.