

Q&A: Avoiding Animal Collisions

The Question:

Confronting an animal on the road presents you with a few potential issues. The question is then, what should you do?

Scope of the problem:

Each year in Australia thousands of collisions occur between motor vehicles and animals (Rowden, Steinhardt & Sheehan, 2008). According to the NSW Centre for Road Safety one in seven crashes on country roads involves an animal (NSW Centre for Road Safety, 2014). Animal strikes are a major problem, obviously, the bigger the animal, the bigger the danger. The nature of the Australian landscape and broad expanse of rural roads exposes road users to encounters with wildlife (Rowden, Steinhardt & Sheehan, 2008). Animals by nature are unpredictable. They may jump in front of your vehicle even if they see you coming. Some animals travel together, this means that if one decides to cross the road the, others may follow. Even if the animal has just crossed the road, there is no telling if it decides to turn around and cross again. Even animals calmly standing at the side of the road may bolt unexpectedly towards the vehicle. Due to this unpredictability it means that it is up to the driver to take necessary precautions to avoid or reduce the impact of a collision.



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Reducing risk:

The most effective way to reduce the likelihood of hitting an animal occurs before getting in the vehicle. This can be done by journey planning, which is an excellent way to minimise risk.

Journey planning has an impact on more than just animal strikes, it is also an important tool in fatigue management and avoiding known high risk areas (e.g. tight corners for heavy vehicles). If the hazards are known prior entering the vehicle you minimise your exposure to the risk instead of minimising the impact when it happens. Animals are most likely to be active at dawn and dusk, in low-lying areas near water.

The first thing should be undertaken a journey plan in which the following should be identified:

- When am I driving?
- Where am I driving?
- How can the problem times and locations be avoided?

Other strategies to avoid animal strikes have been suggested and are listed below.

Mental preparation is a useful tool. It is better to learn how to avoid an encounter with wildlife, than have to react to a dangerous situation unprepared. Think about what you might do if an animal suddenly darted out in front of you

Above all else, the first thing you must consider is your own safety.

If you're driving a car you'll be better off not trying to swerve or take harsh evasive action to avoid the animal. A sudden evasive move on the steering wheel could lead to a loss of control and present you with a much bigger problem. Many

people have discovered the hard way that trying to avoid a relatively small animal can lead to a bigger crash with a tree or oncoming vehicle.

Staying on course is a better action than swerving, as that action you could end up in a ditch or wrapped around a tree. If a collision is inevitable, all you can do is reduce your speed by taking your foot off the accelerator and breaking to lessen the force of the impact.

It's better to focus on prevention rather than cure

Strategies to avoid hitting an animal:

1. Journey Planning

Plan your journey, this should be a core task for all businesses in safety management. The aim is to ensure you aren't driving at peak animal times or avoiding areas with potential high animal traffic zone. Local knowledge of an area should be sought to identify high risk areas. If avoiding an area or time isn't possible, journey planning allows you to identify areas that may be of risk and use all the other strategies here to minimise the risk.

2. Scan

Animals can be hard to see, especially native animals which are great at camouflage. This means that they can take you by surprise by quickly appearing into the vision when previously hidden. Research has shown that wild Australian fauna such as the kangaroo, wombat, wallaby, and emu continue to be among the most prevalent road-kill victims. This means that you should always make sure you are aware of the animals that are native to the area you

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shall be going through and their usual habits. For example, low lying areas attract kangaroos, so if there are likely to be kangaroos, be especially aware of the low lying areas (<http://www.nrspp.org.au/Pool/Resources/Wildlife-30062015-V2.pdf>).

Be sure to look far ahead and scan the side of the road for signs of animal activity.

3. Animal Peak Hour

Animals become more active at dawn and dusk. To make matters worse, our vision is also less effective as day moves into night and vice versa. The reduced effectiveness of the vision is due to the decline in contrast caused by the eyes changing to "night vision", meaning that the surroundings blur together. As the sun still provides illumination, the artificial light sources such as headlights are less effective. This means that visual skills such as reaction time decrease rapidly, (<http://www.nrspp.org.au/Resources/Details/869>).

Be extra vigilant during these times.



4. Environment

Take into account the countryside you're driving in. Is it rural? Is it bushland? Even in the suburbs pets can act irrationally and stray from the path or cross the road suddenly. Areas where wildlife has been sighted or there are indications that there has been one hit previously means that there are likely to be more around.

Take note of the environment you are driving in.

5. Reduce Speed

Staying within the speed limit without using cruise control allows you to have as quick of a reaction time as possible, reducing the breaking distance should the need arise. Driving with cruise control often affects the reaction time as the leg is often removed from the pedals and is unprepared. A secondary side effect to using cruise control in these areas is the driver is more complacent due to not actively thinking about the acceleration. This is critical when you are within wildlife areas. If wildlife are noticed close to the road you should reduce your speed and "cover" the brake.

Stay within the speed limit and drive to the conditions.

What should a driver do if they hit an animal?

What to do after a collision with an animal depends on:

- Type and condition of the road
- Amount of traffic
- Type of animal
- Condition of the driver.

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First you should pull off the road and then:

1. Turn on hazard lights.
2. Illuminate the animal with your head lights if it is dark
3. Warn other drivers if there is a carcass on the road as it will pose a hazard
4. You may choose to carefully approach the animal to determine if it is dead or injured.
5. If it is injured, be careful. A wounded animal can be very dangerous
6. If you do hit an animal or see an injured animal whilst driving you could contact your local council, road authority or animal welfare organisation.
7. Once the all clear has been given by the relevant authority/organisation, check the condition of the car to determine the extent of the damage

Industry Perspective

Perspective One –

How to ensure that you have a collision with the wildlife:

1. Drive on Cruise Control and bend your right leg under the left leg
2. Driving with one hand at 12 o'clock on the steering wheel
3. Being laid back, nice and comfy

Perspective Two (Recommended) –

How to reduce the chances of you having a collision with an animal:

1. Establish where wildlife (in this case kangaroos), might be more likely:
 - Low lying areas
 - Dusk and dawn
 - Scrub
 - After rain or dew when previously dry weather
2. Consider reducing your speed to 80 Km/h
 - Travelling at 80 Km/h instead of 110 Km/h will take 12 seconds longer (per Km)
 - Travelling at 80 Km/h instead of 100 Km/h will take 9 seconds longer (per Km)

