

Our Wild Neighbors: Put on Your Wild Eyes!

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In every season of the year, wildlife is moving through the natural world around us. We share our home with many different species who have lived here long before humans were on the scene. Now, neighborhoods, roads, and highways carve through their natural habitats and movement corridors.

Unfortunately, more cars bring a rise in Wildlife Vehicle Collisions (WVCs). Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) states that each year for the last decade, there has been an average of 2,000-4,000 reported WVCs across Colorado. Protecting all wildlife requires extra awareness, community action, and preventive measures. **One way we can honor our wild neighbors is by learning new ways of seeing and responding to them—Put on your wild eyes!**



First, let's look at some of the seasonal characteristics of wildlife:

Spring and Summer

Most of our resident wildlife give birth in the spring including Mule Deer, Bears, Raccoons, Squirrels, Skunks, Turkeys, Geese, Foxes, and countless smaller animals and birds. Mountain Lions and Bobcats can give birth any time of year, but spring is most common. Bears also come out of hibernation in spring and become more active in their search for food. "Fawn Season" usually begins in early June. Because inexperienced young animals, unaware of the dangers posed by cars, wander onto highways and roads, baby animals are particularly at risk.



In summer, we see an increase of wildlife "toddlers" exploring their surroundings with their mothers. The young ones often follow their moms and may lag behind or jut out in front as they get older. Wildlife families may be searching for food, water, or new habitat. This search often leads them close to danger.

Fall and Winter

Respect the Rut! Mule Deer rutting season (or mating season) usually occurs from October through December. Bucks chase Does, and Bucks vie for dominance among their herd. These Deer are often running at full speed and not looking both ways for oncoming traffic when they cross the road.

The end of Daylight Savings Time also increases the risk for WVC's. It gets darker earlier and rush hour starts earlier, with more cars on the roads before sunrise and after sunset. The hours between dusk and dawn are the most vulnerable times for our wildlife—many species are naturally more active at these times, but drivers have a harder time seeing them.

In winter, animals can be attracted to asphalt for radiant warmth and to lick salt residue from snowplows. Wildlife may aggregate along roads and are at risk of being hit by cars, especially when the roads are slick.



How to Develop “Wild Eyes” to Protect Wildlife:

- Pay attention to Wildlife Safety Signs which alert drivers to the likelihood of animals in the area
- Be attentive and avoid distractions while driving
- Scan the road and shoulders for movement, or shiny eyes reflecting after dark
- Reduce speed in recognized Wildlife Zones (includes the Front Range west of the Hogback)
- Come to a complete stop when wildlife is present. Remember, “Fawns Follow Moms” (as do cubs, kits, and chicks) and young ones may lag behind or jut out in front.
- Avoid swerving—stop and allow mom and baby to pass safely
- Be keenly aware during all seasons and especially from dusk to dawn
- Give them a brake—Don't honk your horn! This may cause animals to freeze in the road or run into oncoming traffic. Instead, use your brakes and come to a full stop
- Use high beams in low light (this better illuminates the road ahead)
- Community Signaling—Flash your headlights and turn on rear hazard lights to alert other drivers in front and behind you that there is wildlife on or near the road
- Community Education—share wildlife awareness with your neighbors, guests, and service providers visiting our area
- Support wildlife-safe fencing projects, tunnels, overpasses, and wildlife crossings (these have been shown to decrease WVC's by 90%!)



If you see an animal is hit, call 911 and contact Colorado Parks & Wildlife at (303) 291-7227. Do not approach the injured animal. The animal is frightened and in pain. Any sudden movement may add to the injury. Wildlife officials may be able to rescue injured animals and take distressed babies to rehabilitation centers.

Protecting wildlife from WVC's is a shared responsibility that requires mindfulness and proactive behavior from all motorists. By implementing safe driving practices and spreading awareness, we can reduce the risks to our majestic wild neighbors. **Use your "wild eyes" and always give wildlife the right-of-way.**



For more wildlife information, visit the Willowbrook Wildlife website at <https://willowbrookwildlife.wixsite.com/wbwc>