

Tasmania – Roadkill State

Every year it is estimated that more than 500,000 marsupials, birds and reptiles are killed on Tasmania's roads. This figure is only an estimate as many injured animals leave the roads to die, and dead animals are removed by carrion eating species, so the actual number could be much higher, closer to 1,000,000!

The rate of roadkill in Tasmania is the highest in Australia and equates to one dead animal visible on the road or road verge every two-four kilometres at any given point in time. In some areas, termed 'hotspots', the number of animals killed per kilometre is much higher.

Which species are affected?

A large number of species are killed on the roads.

Those most commonly killed are:

- Brushtail Possum
- Tasmanian Pademelon
- Bennetts Wallaby
- Eastern Quoll
- Eastern Barred Bandicoot (listed as vulnerable to extinction)
- Tasmanian Devil (endangered)
- Native-hens and Masked Lapwings (Plovers)

Other species found dead on our roads include:

- Echidnas, Wombats and Bettongs
- Tiger Quoll (listed as vulnerable to extinction)
- Southern Brown Bandicoot
- Long-nosed Southern Potoroo
- Ring Tail Possum
- Forester Kangaroo
- Even the Platypus! (especially after flooding rains)
- Numerous species of birds, large and small, including birds of prey such as the Brown Falcon and the Brown Goshawk, and Owls, that come down to feed on the dead animals and are then killed themselves. Even Wedge-tailed Eagles can be found feeding on dead animals on the roadside
- Frogs (too small to be included in roadkill surveys)
 - Blue Tongue Lizards
 - Tiger Snakes



The roadkill issue is so serious, that in some cases it has caused local extinctions of particularly vulnerable species such as the Eastern Quoll and the Eastern Barred Bandicoot—this means that every member of a family group in that location has been killed on the road.

Why does wildlife use our roads?

It is not only the human animal that uses human roads! Native animals find them very attractive for a number of reasons. Some species like the roads because they are warm - this includes reptiles - but species attracted to the warmth a bitumen road can hold in the evening include wombats and quolls. Insects are also attracted to the warm road surface, and this in turn attracts insect-eating species such as quolls.

Our roads cross through the habitat and territories of native animals. Animals such as wallabies and pademelons cross roads where they bisect their habitat. Some species also enjoy grazing on roadside verges and devils scout along roads for fresh roadkill to eat.

Other species such as quolls and devils use roads for long distance travel as they provide an easier travelling surface than travelling through the bush. Animals are often killed crossing the road to drink at creeks, rivers or dams; especially in the drier months and during extended drought periods.

Why does road kill happen?

The reason why roadkill is so high in Tasmania compared with other states is not clear. Some people believe that we have larger populations of wild animals in Tasmania than elsewhere in Australia, others believe the reason is the type of species that are most prevalent here, and make up the bulk of those killed on the roads. Spring and summer is the worst time of year, as young begin to leave pouches, and move about on their own.



What can you do?

 Some ways that your family can reduce the chance of killing an animal on the road:

- Drive more slowly at night than you normally would, particularly at dusk and dawn. These are the times when animals are most active.
- What's around the corner or over the rise? Always expect that there could be an animal just out of sight. Many animals are killed on road bends, rises or dips.
- Watch for shadows and movement at the road edge, be alert, and slow down accordingly.
- If you see one animal or bird crossing the road, expect another and react appropriately. Small birds are often in flocks, native hens and many marsupials are in pairs or small groups – especially female brushtail possums and pademelons with young.
- Never assume an animal or bird will move before you are on top of them – the evidence is all around that they often don't. Modern cars are very quiet.
- You shouldn't swerve suddenly as it is dangerous: just taking your foot off the accelerator for a moment, or a gentle touch on the brake is often enough to give the bird or animal time to escape, if you are not able to slow right down.
- If it is not possible to avoid an animal safely, give your horn a blast to at least give it a chance.
- Keep in mind that many animals do not view vehicles as a threat as they haven't evolved a defence strategy for vehicles: cars don't smell or look like predators. If you were to stop and get out of your vehicle, or wind your window down and shout, the animal would be off in a flash.
- Be aware that in spring and summer reptiles appear on the roads so look closely at anything on the road that at first glance appears to be a stick.

 Adopting these safe driving techniques will save many non-human lives, and you never know, they may save human ones too! Insurance companies pay out millions of dollars every year for accidents involving collisions with wildlife. The roads will be safer for all road users – human and non-human alike.

 Here are few more ways that you can become part of the solution:

- If you live in a country area, do your own survey of roadkill as you travel between home and your nearest town. Your local council may be interested

in the data you collect.

- Some Councils have a *Roadkill Mitigation Strategy*. Ask your council to become involved in solving the roadkill problem.

Marsupials are mainly killed between dusk and 11pm, or around dawn. These are the times when the animals are most active and are crossing roads moving to and from their feeding areas coinciding with the period of high vehicle traffic. Animals are dazzled by car headlights and don't know how to escape. Some, such as devils and possums, have dark fur and are not very visible to an inattentive driver against the black bitumen of the road.

Birds (other than owls) and reptiles are mostly killed during daylight hours. Small birds, such as silvereyes and parrots, swoop low over the road, making them vulnerable to collision with vehicles. Reptiles use the road to warm themselves and their colour makes them hard to see on the road.

A large percentage of animal deaths could be avoided. Speed and inattention from drivers is the main cause. Another cause is bad road design. Many roads are bounded by steep banks, ditches, culverts and centre barriers that bar escape routes for trapped animals.

Regrettably (or sadly) many motorists don't adjust their driving when passing through areas where wildlife commonly cross the roads, and especially when wildlife is most active.

How can we stop it happening?

Educating drivers on how to drive safely for themselves, and the other species with which we share our roads, is the main way roadkill can be reduced in the near future.

When new roads are being designed we can ensure that escape routes are planned, and we can ask for changes to existing roads where there are wildlife roadkill blackspots, and erection of speed reduction signage for the dusk to dawn period in blackspot areas.

If you find injured, sick or orphaned wildlife:

Call a rescue service for advice. Be safe on roads and with stressed injured animals. Keep the animal warm, especially orphans and animals in shock. A pillow case kept in the glovebox is good for transporting many species, and a sturdy pair of gloves is handy. Keep the animal as quiet and dark as possible and get it to help as soon as you can.

Keep a wildlife rescue phone number in the glovebox of your car or in your wallet. Phone DPIWWE on 6233 6556 during business hours or Bonorong Friends of Carers program at any time on 6268 1184.