



DRIVING CHANGE: PROTECTING THE PROTECTED

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South Africa currently has a serious problem with regards to road-related fatalities, and this epidemic is relevant to wildlife too. Insurance claims suggest that approximately R82.5 million is paid each year against collisions with wild animals, though the costs to wildlife of these collisions are never calculated. So what are the consequences for animals? The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) is tackling this question and working to find solutions to the problems associated with wildlife and transport infrastructure.

Perhaps the most obvious concern is the direct and negative consequences of vehicle-wildlife collisions, more commonly known as 'roadkill'. Reports via social media platforms from members of the public show a high level of public disquiet and emotional concern about the rate of road deaths in parks, including issues related to speeding and careless driving, and the conservation impacts and wildlife welfare risks such driving poses. To take a closer look into the problem the EWT launched a new project in 2014 aimed specifically at wildlife and road issues in nature reserves and parks.

In 2014, Pilanesberg National Park was the first reserve to support the initiative, where many wildlife species including leopard and zebra have been killed on the roads. Following this, research continued in Addo Elephant National Park in 2015. The research team set out to monitor driver behaviour through placing a fake snake on the road, and recording how many times it was 'hit' and the speed at which the vehicle was travelling. We found that approximately 50% of drivers hit the fake snake. "From our survey, it seems that observation levels of the driver, rather than the speed of the vehicle, is the key factor in causing roadkill," explains Wendy Collinson, the Project Executant of the EWT's Wildlife and Roads Project.

Armed with a better understanding of the reasons why roadkill may be happening in national parks, the research team have returned to Pilanesberg National Park to undertake follow-up work. "A driver awareness campaign is to be launched in parks to make drivers more aware of animals on the roads themselves," Collinson commented. "We plan to test a number of awareness-measures with visitors to the park and to assess which method works best. This will guide us on future decisions in other parks that will improve the quality of the experience of park visitors and safeguard the animals in these protected areas," she concluded.

The EWT is also excited to announce that the project has expanded to Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park through a joint collaboration with the University of KwaZulu-Natal and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, as well as Table Mountain National Park, where preliminary roadkill surveys have begun. “We are also eagerly awaiting the start of some surveys to begin in Kruger National Park, with support from the University of Mpumalanga and SANParks,” stated Collinson. “There is an urgent need to better quantify and understand the impacts of roads on wildlife in protected areas and to develop and test methods to manage these. Ultimately, through understanding the causes of roadkill, this project will guide further research, specifically for recommended roadkill-reduction measures in other protected areas in South Africa.”

The project is novel, unique and innovative in its design since it also uses volunteers or citizen scientists to assist with data collection. Citizen scientists are becoming more recognised by wildlife researchers as a support to expert data collection. To galvanise public participation to this process, the EWT has taken to the internet to get people to report wildlife fatalities. The EWT has a Smartphone app, *Road Watch*, which allows data to be quickly and accurately captured, assisting people to easily submit their information. Other social media platforms include Facebook and LinkedIn.

The EWT's Wildlife and Roads Project in Protected Areas is supported by Bridgestone SA, Copenhagen Zoo and Mikros Traffic Monitoring. Collaborations include: Mpumalanga University, University of KZN, North West Parks and Tourism Board, South African National Parks and Africa:Live.

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