

Get Wild: Living with wildlife

Frank Lilly



Wildlife is pictured using the overpass and underpass crossings along Colorado Highway 9 north of Silverthorne during a five-year study. Seventeen species used the crossings throughout the duration of the study.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife/Courtesy photos

We are a fortunate minority who live in the mountains of Colorado. We have incredible scenery, endless recreational opportunities and clean air. We are often lucky enough to view photogenic wildlife such as deer, elk, moose and birds of prey.

But are we really attuned to living side by side with our truly wild friends?

Almost everyone knows to be careful with trash and bird feeders to keep them away from bears. But how do we behave when we are truly inconvenienced by wildlife?

For example, beavers are not only cute, but they and their ponds are very important to a balanced ecosystem. They provide habitat for fish, important storage for the watershed and fire mitigation. Their wetland ecosystems also provide much-needed carbon sequestration. But who wants a beaver pond to flood their pasture, road or backyard? There are beaver dam analogs, mimicking beaver dams and enticing beavers to beneficial locations for the beavers and for environmental enhancements.

The growth and development in Summit County, as well as most of the rest of Colorado, is legendary. There are millions of us who want to live here. In addition, the construction provides a livelihood for many of us. But how often do we think of the effect of encroaching on wildlife habitat? Fortunately for Summit County wildlife, 70% of the county is protected land, either as National Forest or county open space. But I think we have all experienced a beloved area succumb to the march of development.

The second-leading cause of bird deaths, after habitat loss, is predation from house cats. Literally billions (with a B) of birds are killed each year by domestic cats in the U.S. As a cat lover, I used to let my cats roam outside. When I learned how lethal they are for birds, I decided to keep my

pets inside, both to help protect the birds and for their own safety. After all, cats make yummy meals for foxes and coyotes.

Another high cause of mortality for birds is collision with our structures — primarily our windows. All of us who have big windows so that we can enjoy the view have experienced this. A relatively easy way to decrease, if not entirely eliminate, these collisions is to install UV-reflecting window

stickers, films or grid patterns. You can buy these for your windows at WindowAlert.com

A third relatively simple action that individuals can take to help birds is to eliminate light pollution. I used to think that this was just an issue of aesthetics (I love to stargaze), but then I learned that light pollution greatly interferes with bird migration. So please, turn off all unnecessary outdoor lights, and ensure that all necessary lights are downward casting.

Another major problem for wildlife is our beloved (and hated) highway system. We have all seen plenty of roadkill. Colorado averages about 4,000 wildlife vs. vehicle crashes annually. November sees more of these collisions than any other month, according to the Colorado Department of Transportation. So what is to be done? One simple solution is to slow down, especially at dusk when wildlife are most likely to be active.

On a larger scale, the installation of wildlife crossings over highways can make a huge difference. A perfect example of a project of this sort was completed on Colorado Highway 9 in 2016. This combination of fencing, wildlife bridges and tunnels has resulted in [a 90% reduction](#) in wildlife collisions in an area of deer and elk habitat and movement corridors.

Do your part to protect our wildlife, minimizing human impact on our beloved wild animals.



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“Get Wild” publishes on Fridays in the Summit Daily News. Frank Lilly is a longtime resident of Summit County and a member of the Eagle-Summit Wilderness Alliance, an all-volunteer nonprofit that helps the U.S. Forest Service protect and preserve the wilderness areas in Eagle and Summit counties. For more information, visit EagleSummitWilderness.org