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## Best strategy is to reduce roads



IN road accidents involving human deaths, cases are noted and investigated. But with deaths that involve just wildlife, no investigation or preventive safety measures are taken.

Drivers of vehicles go off scot-free as there is no compensation to be paid regardless of whether the animal is an endangered or rare species. Worst, some dead animals are mutilated by people for their body parts because of a belief in their aphrodisiac value. Who is at fault for roadkill? When driving, most motorists do not keep an open mind to the possibilities of slow scurrying mammals, amphibians and reptiles crossing the road in front of them. The most commonly killed animals are monitor lizards, snakes, pangolin, frogs and monkeys.

The expanding network of roads through wildlife habitats and increasing traffic volume are accelerating species extinction. This is one of the major causes of wildlife decimation, along with forest clearance, habitat destruction, clearance of wetlands, over-exploitation and poaching, and trade in wildlife. Construction of roads through wildlife habitats, resulting in fragmented forests, should be a serious

concern for the country as it opens more new roads that dissect age-old wildlife travel routes.

To reduce roadkill, the authorities have come up with eco-bridges or viaducts, underpasses and overpasses to enable wildlife to move from one fragmented forest to another. But the question remains as to how effective these facilities are for the purpose of safe wildlife crossings.

Wildlife crossings may help to reduce the impact of roadkill, but they are not the panacea to prevent the ill-effects of roads on wildlife and should not justify the building of roads into wildlife habitats. The first option is to prevent roads slicing through wildlife habitats. Nothing will completely eradicate animal deaths. But highway authorities should make people aware of the enormity of roadkill tragedies, which should be incorporated into driver education courses. Drivers must be encouraged to watch out for animals in or near roads. Involving news media through radio and television announcements would do well to educate drivers.

If any road development is likely to cause an impact on the native fauna, an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) must be carried out and advice sought from the wildlife authorities.

With an expanding human population needing more roads and connectivity, proactive and strategic planning to reduce roadkill should be the main focus in any future planning of road projects that involve wildlife habitats.

The best strategy, of course, is to reduce the need for roads along wildlife habitats.

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