



1.0 Wildlife and Highways in British Columbia

1.1 Introduction

Wildlife represents a significant and valued natural resource in the Province of British Columbia. Consequently, for over 30 years, as part of its ongoing commitment to environmental stewardship, the British Columbia Ministry of Transportation (BCMoT) has been actively working to protect wildlife near highways.

To identify and monitor highway locations where motor vehicle-related wildlife mortality occurs, BCMoT has been operating its Wildlife Accident Reporting System (WARS) since the late 1970's (Sielecki, 2004). Initially the Ministry's operational staff, and then since privatization in the 1980's, its maintenance contractors, have collected detailed species and location information on "roadkilled" wildlife found on the numbered Provincial highways under BCMoT's jurisdiction. The information is collected on a daily basis and entered into the Ministry's WARS database.

As the WARS database has grown, it has become an increasingly valuable resource for BCMoT planning and operational purposes. Although the WARS system was originally developed to meet Ministry needs, it offers a rare opportunity for other researchers to examine the wildlife habitat/highway interface over an extended period of time. Consequently, the Ministry has been working to increase the value of the information collected through the WARS system.

To assist Ministry maintenance contractors more accurately identify wildlife animals found on Provincial highways and increase the amount and quality of information on the wildlife reported in the WARS Monthly Wildlife Accident Report (H0107) (*Figure 1*) this wildlife "roadkill" identification guide was developed.

1.2 Purpose

This guide provides general information on a number of wildlife species found on British Columbia highways and is not intended to be an exhaustive and comprehensive reference authority on any of the species. The guide is intended to assist those identifying carcasses of wild animals by providing a general description of the physical appearance, life stages, numerical abundance and geographic distribution of each animal. Where identification of a wild animal is difficult because of the condition of its remains, more accurate reporting may be possible by observing identifiable physical characteristics, such as coat colour, physical size and footprint patterns, and cross referencing these details with typical seasonal periods of activity and known mapped habitat locations near Provincial highways.

Improvements in species identification will help support the Ministry's species-specific wildlife impact mitigation measures. In addition, accurate species identification will contribute to the decision process for Ministry investments in wildlife exclusion systems to protect motorists and wildlife.