

A Note on Road Kills

H. J. de S. DISNEY AND P. J. FULLAGAR.

Little has been recorded on animal road casualties in Australia except for the careful and detailed account by Vestjens (1973). Below are given the results of two surveys, one in late spring and one in late autumn, on the Hume Highway between Yass in New South Wales and Seymour in Victoria, a distance of 496 km.

List of animals killed between Yass, N.S.W. and Seymour, Vic. in order of abundance.

Species	12 Nov. 1977	12 May 1978
Magpie		
<i>Gymnorhina tibicen</i>	19	6
Rabbit		
<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	8	6
Small birds	6	3
Unidentified bird?	6	—
Galah		
<i>Cacatua roseicapilla</i>	3	3
Kookaburra		
<i>Dacelo novaeguineae</i>	4	1
Possum—brush-tailed?		
<i>Trichosurus vulpecula</i>	—	4
Cat		
<i>Felis catus</i>	—	3
Tawny Frogmouth		
<i>Podargus strigoides</i>	1	1
Fox		
<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	1	1
Pelican		
<i>Pelicanus conspicillatus</i>	1	—
Sacred Kingfisher		
<i>Halcyon sancta</i>	1	—
Magpie-lark		
<i>Grallina cyanoleuca</i>	—	1
Sugar Glider		
<i>Petaurus breviceps</i>	1	—
Grey Kangaroo		
<i>Macropus giganteus</i>	1	—
Dog		
<i>Canis familiaris</i>	—	1
Snake	1	—
Unidentified mammal	—	1
Total animals	53	31
Total birds	41	15
Total mammals	11	16
Reptiles	1	—
1 specimen every	9 km	16 km
1 bird every	12 km	33 km
1 mammal every	45 km	35 km

Discussion

These observations were carried out from a car travelling usually at about 80-100 km/h, and no stops were made to examine or identify specimens.

The distance of 496 km includes towns and built-up areas.

The results are similar to those obtained by Vestjens, who found one bird killed every 13 kilometres and one mammal every 30 kilometres. Magpies were the commonest birds found dead, being 36% of the total birds killed in spring. This agrees with the 37% of Vestjens for the whole of his survey. However, the autumn count of dead magpies was only 19% of the total birds at that time. When both surveys were combined magpies were 30% of the birds killed. While nearly four times more birds than mammals were found killed in the spring count, the numbers were nearly equal in the autumn count, there actually being a higher recording of mammals in the autumn. However, in the autumn there were more predators and scavengers killed. Perhaps this indicates the lack of prey available in autumn and that these species scavenge more on the roads for dead and injured animals.

References

- Vestjens, W. J. M. (1973). 'Wildlife Mortality on a Road in New South Wales.' *Emu* 73: 107-112.

H. J. de S. Disney, The Australian Museum, Sydney, N.S.W. 2000.

Dr P. J. Fullagar, CSIRO, Div. Wildlife Research, Canberra, 2602.