

INSIDE AURORA: Critter Crossing

By Scott Johnston

We're fortunate to have such a varied array of wildlife living here with us in Aurora.

I realize you may question that when hornets take up residence in the soffit above your front door, but in general, it's relaxing to see the groundhogs, ducks, chipmunks, cardinals and all manner of other critters that call our Town home.

Of course, with the abundance of wildlife it is necessary to watch for it when out driving. As cute as a bunny can be, one prefers to see them with their insides on the inside, so to speak.

To prevent excess roadkill, the Town has helpfully installed cautionary animal-related warning signs in some areas. There may be other species represented, but I've seen them for turtles, ducks and geese.

As suggested by the signs I've seen, these usually appear near water, but there's a lot of water in Town in the form of creeks and ponds, and there are not signs at all of the adjacent roads. It got me thinking how they decide where signs should go.

Presumably they're located along stretches of road that see regular animal crossings. However, there is a sign in my neighbourhood showing a trio of geese.

I've lived in this area many years and pass through that spot probably a hundred times a month at all times of the day in all seasons. In all of the probably couple thousand times I've been through there, I've never once seen a goose.

Perhaps this is reminiscent of a situation that occurred on my in-laws rural street some time ago. There was herd of deer in the area, and one seemed to be hit by a car every week or so.

Eventually, the municipality relented to all the calls for a deer crossing sign and installed one along that stretch of road. To my knowledge there were never any deer hit after that, but no one saw them in the area anymore either, so I think that ?success? may be more based on the fact that by that stage there weren't any deer left to hit, than due to the effectiveness of the sign.

Perhaps that's what's happened near me with the geese. Maybe at one point there were some, but they all got picked off, and by the time the sign was installed, that local population was extinct.

Either that, or they have developed some sort of avian cloaking technology.

Apart from sign location, I'm also curious about what critters go on a sign. There is no end of wildlife in York Region, and most of it must cross a road at some point.

Why don't we see signs for squirrel crossing, or for toads, or other animals we see in Town? Certainly, raccoons seem to be the most common casualties, so should warrant a sign or two. Perhaps ducks and geese have better lobby groups?

But I guess there are other implications. If we had signs for every potential species, you'd never see any scenery when driving other than a solid wall of orange hazard signs.

As for the cost to produce, install and maintain so many signs, that would be a big budget item for the Town right up there with funds allocated to lawsuits, and studies for Library Square.

Bottom line; there can't be signs everywhere, and not every species can be represented, so you may not be aware that wildlife is prone to running out along certain stretches of road.

While that may not cause too much concern if it's a chipmunk, it could be something that has a greater physical impact, like a deer, or a skunk.

So keep an eye out.

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