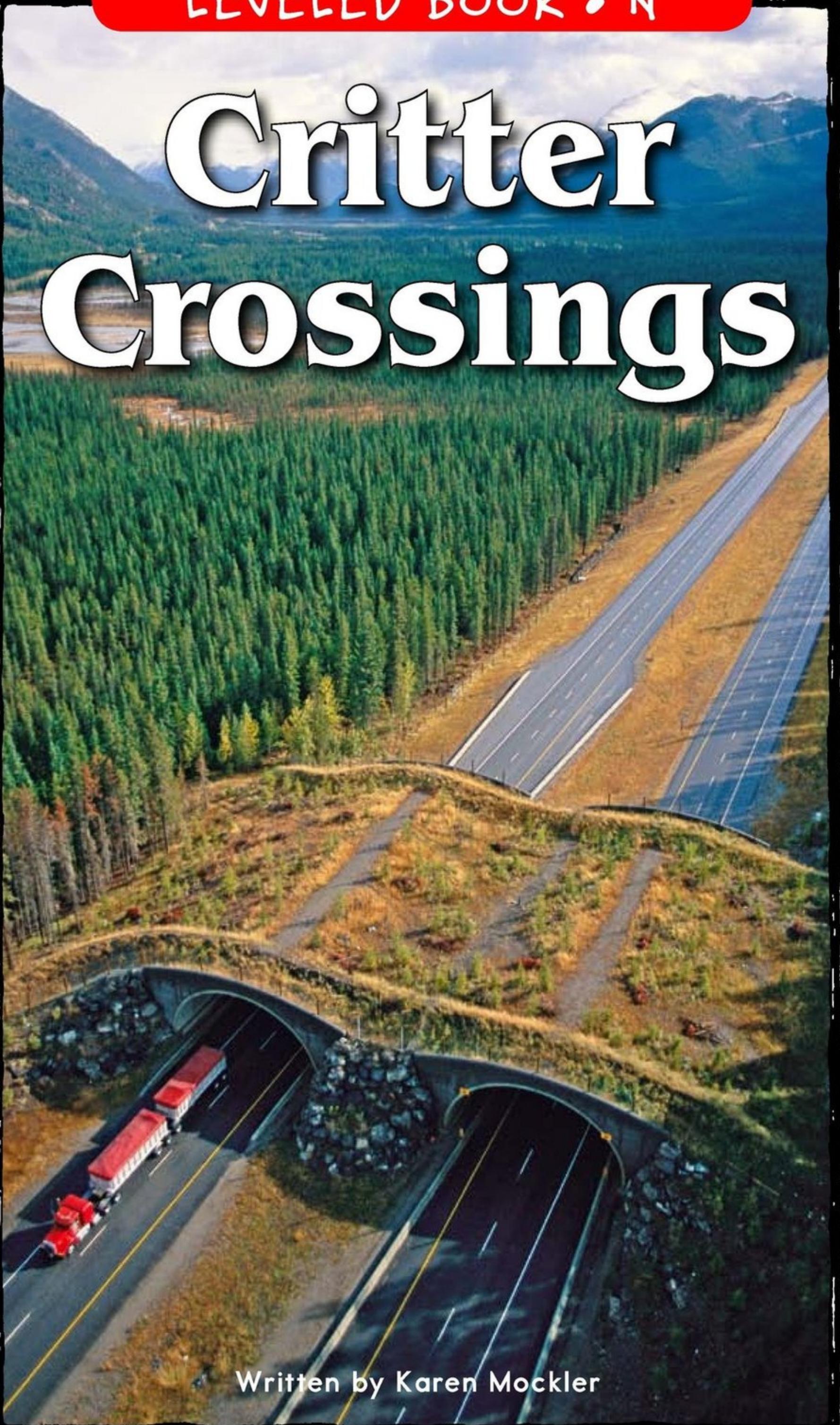


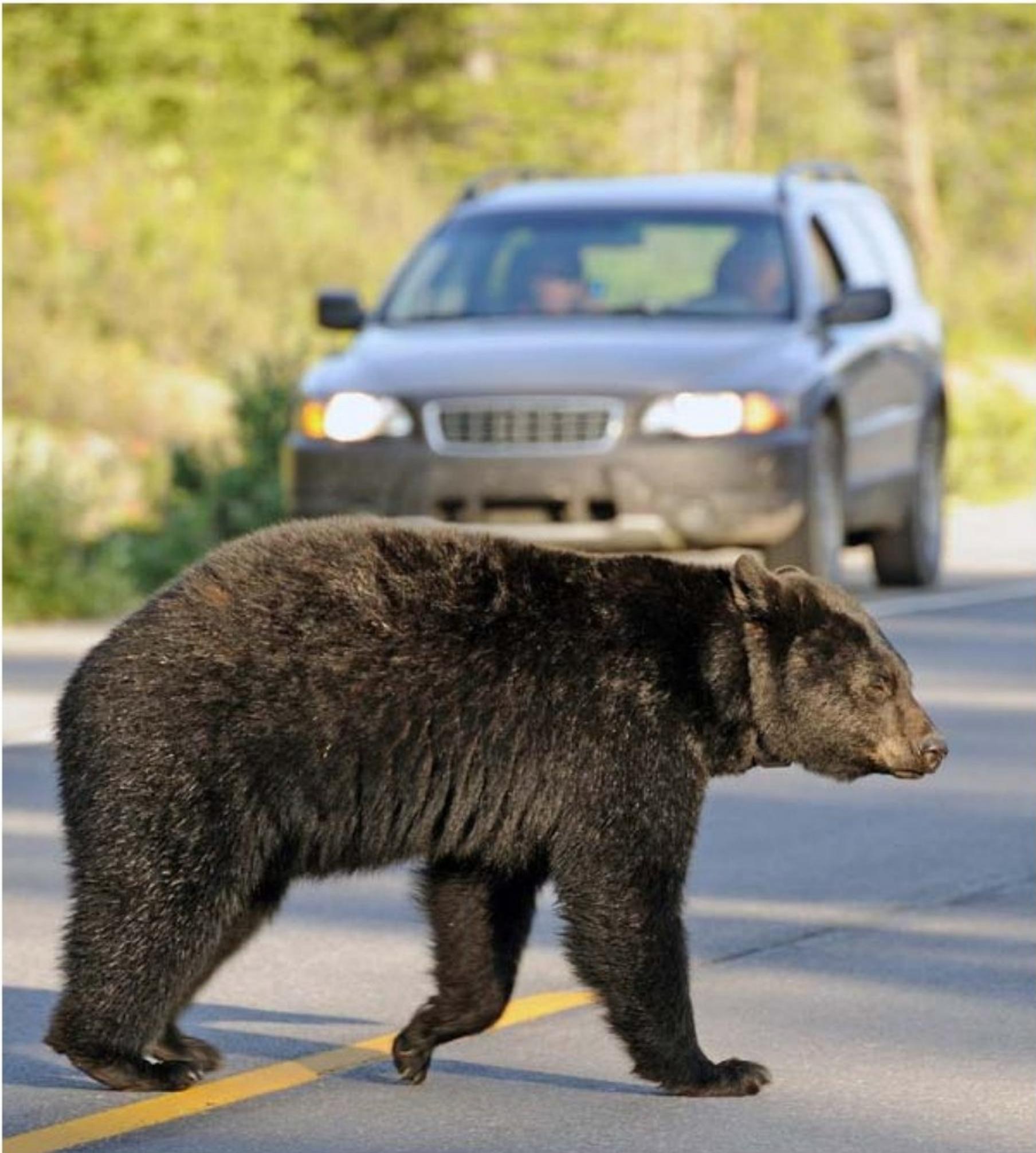
LEVELED BOOK • N

Critter Crossings



Written by Karen Mockler

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Christmas Island, Australia, closes some roads every year to let red crabs cross in safety.

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A turtle crossing the road faces many dangers.

Introduction

Imagine you are a turtle stuck on one side of a six-lane freeway. On the other side is food, room to roam, and maybe even a mate. Huge metal monsters race past you. They move much faster than you ever can. How can you hope to safely cross without being flattened?

Many animals—not just turtles—face the dangers of crossing roads every day. Some make it across, while others don't. Humans can help these animals safely move to the other side by building critter crossings, or ecopassages. They come in many different types, but they all help animals—including humans—stay alive.



Many moose are killed each year when they are hit by cars. These accidents can kill people, as well.



The four-lane Trans-Canada Highway runs through the middle of Banff National Park.

Banff Is the Best

Banff National Park in Canada has some of the most beautiful mountains in North America. It also has the Trans-Canada Highway running through it. During the busy summer, the highway may carry more than 25,000 **vehicles** each day. It used to be the site of hundreds of **collisions** between animals and vehicles each year.



Then Parks Canada built over thirty animal underpasses and overpasses (with more planned for the future). The crossings cost millions of dollars and raised an important question: what if the animals didn't use them?

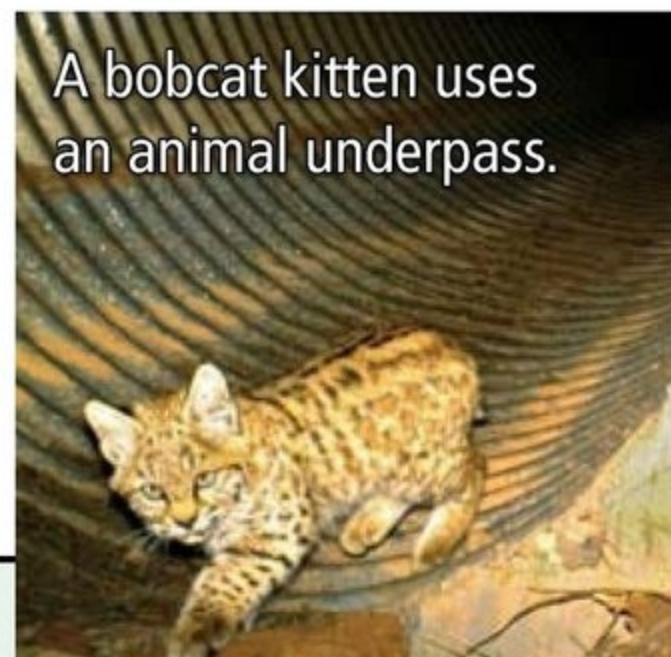
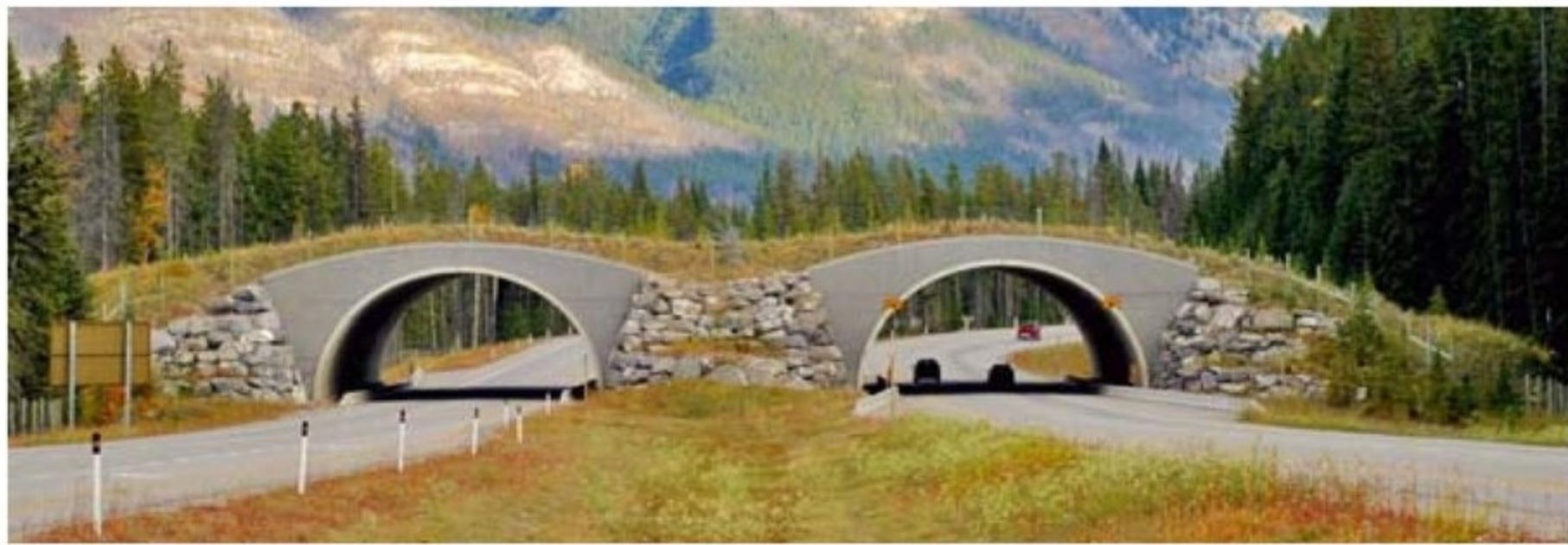


Photo courtesy of Rocky Mountain Wild, Eco-Resolutions, and the Colorado Department of Transportation

Keeping Track

People use different methods to keep track of animals using the crossings. Cameras at some crossings take pictures whenever an animal uses them. Other crossings use soft dirt or sand track pads. Animals leave footprints on these pads when they pass through. Humans can study the tracks in the pads before raking them clean.



Species	Overpass	Underpass
Grizzly bear	317	10
Black bear	58	44
Wolf	597	172
Cougar	41	66
Coyote	319	66
Moose	84	1
Deer	10,377	636
Elk	1,388	418

Data source: Banff Wildlife Crossings Project, 2009

This chart shows how many large mammals used twenty-three different wildlife crossings in Banff National Park from November 7, 1996 to March 31, 2009.

Many animals use overpasses (top) to cross the highway. A camera outside an animal underpass takes a picture of a deer (below).



That first year, only one black bear and one mountain lion used the Banff crossings—one time each. Today, however, all sorts of animals move above and below the highway. As of 2011, animals have used the passes to cross more than 220,000 times.



The endangered spotted salamander can now migrate and mate in safety.

Look Out for the Little Guy

Massachusetts created the first U.S. tunnels for the spotted salamander. Each year, these **endangered** animals **migrate** from the forest, across a busy street, to the water to mate. Two narrow tunnels under the road now let them migrate in safety.



The lip along the top of this wall in Florida keeps small animals off the road (right), while the passage underneath (main) allows them to cross.

Florida wanted to save the lives of thousands of snakes, frogs, and other small animals. So the state built walls along either side of U.S. 441. Each wall is 42 inches (107 cm) high. At the top of each wall is a 6-inch (15 cm) lip that these small animals cannot climb over. This lip keeps the animals off the surface of the road. Tunnels underneath the road help the animals cross to the other side.

Why Bother?

Building these crossings costs millions of dollars, which some might argue is too much money. Consider this: each year in the United States, there are more than one million collisions between vehicles and animals. These crashes kill over 200 people per year and cost billions of dollars in repairs, cleanup, and hospital bills. Building more animal crossings would lower the number of crashes. For example, the crossings in Banff cut the number of animals killed by vehicles by more than 80 percent. The smaller number of collisions saves money and the lives of humans and many other animals.



A camera in an animal underpass takes a picture of a grizzly bear as it crosses.

Even More Reasons

Sometimes these crossings can save animals from **extinction**. The number of grizzly bears in Banff is very low. A few adult females killed on the road could have meant the end of these bears in the park. Thanks to the passages, though, the grizzly bears can cross the highway safely. For other endangered animals, a safe crossing may not only save the animal, but the entire species.

Ecopassages also help large animals find food. Mountain lions and bears may roam hundreds of miles during the year to find prey. Roads can cut up **habitats** and sometimes keep animals from being able to move freely. Species that can't cross roads to reach food have less of a chance to survive.



Mountain lions often have to cross busy roads in search of prey.



A rare bighorn sheep relaxes with her lamb.

Animals need to find mates, as well. Roads can keep members of the same species apart. If they can't find a mate, they can't have babies. Without babies, a species can quickly disappear from an area. In some cases, it can even lead to the extinction of a species.

Conclusion

Imagine you are the turtle again. The metal monsters race by. This time, though, someone has built an animal crossing. You happen to look down and spot a tunnel that leads underneath the road. You slowly make your way toward the tunnel.

You are
safe for one
more day.

Did You Know?

Some turtles can take more than seven hours to cross a two-lane road!



This turtle is safe on the other side of the road.

Glossary

collisions (<i>n.</i>)	the violent or forceful impacts of objects (p. 6)
endangered (<i>adj.</i>)	in danger of dying out completely (p. 9)
extinction (<i>n.</i>)	the process by which an entire group of animals or plants dies out (p. 12)
habitats (<i>n.</i>)	the natural environments of plants or animals (p. 13)
migrate (<i>v.</i>)	to move from one habitat or region to another at a certain time each year (p. 9)
vehicles (<i>n.</i>)	anything not living that is used to move people or goods (p. 6)

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Front cover: This overpass in Banff National Park in Canada allows animals to safely cross the highway.

Back cover: A camera in an animal underpass takes a picture of a curious deer.

Title page: A black bear walks across a busy road.

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