

How creating wildlife crossings can help reindeer, bears – and even crabs

Level: Intermediate

1 Warmer

Match the geographical areas or places with the countries in which they are located.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. the Yucatán Peninsula | a. Canada |
| 2. the Santa Monica Mountains | b. Sweden |
| 3. the Banff National Park, Alberta | c. Mexico |
| 4. the South Downs National Park | d. Australia |
| 5. Christmas Island | e. the USA |
| 6. Umeå | f. the UK |

2 Key words

Find the words in the text to complete these sentences. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

- _____ is a small, soft plant that grows on surfaces such as trees or walls. (para 1)
- A/An _____ is a long bridge on high posts, usually across a valley. (para 2)
- If you _____ something, you make it less painful, severe or serious. (para 3)
- A/An _____ is the type of place that an animal usually lives in. (para 4)
- _____ is a situation when animals produce babies with members of their own family. (para 5)
- _____ is an animal that has been killed by a vehicle and is lying in the road. (para 7)
- _____ is an action or set of actions that you perform automatically and without thinking. (two words, para 8)
- If something is _____, people disagree about it. (para 9)
- A/An _____ is the way people think or feel about something. (para 10)
- If you _____ something, you make it improve, become more active or start again after it has stopped or slowed down. (para 10)

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Patrick Greenfield

23 January, 2021

- 1 Every April, Sweden's busy main motorway is blocked by hundreds of reindeer as they begin their journey west to the mountains after a winter eating lichen near the city of Umeå. The crossings can often be dangerous, especially if authorities do not arrive in time to close the road. Sometimes, drivers try to overtake the reindeer as they cross – this frightens the animals and causes long traffic jams.
- 2 "During difficult climate conditions, these lichen lands are even more important for the reindeer," says Per Sandström of the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. Recently, Swedish authorities announced they would build up to a dozen "renoducts" (reindeer viaducts) to allow reindeer herds to cross more easily.
- 3 It is hoped the crossings will allow herders to find fresh grazing lands and alleviate traffic jams, and also help other animals to move around. The country's 4,500 herders and 250,000 reindeer have been badly affected by the climate crisis, battling forest fires in the summer and freezing rain in the winter.
- 4 The renoducts are part of a growing number of wildlife bridges and underpasses around the world that aim to connect habitats. On the Yucatán Peninsula in Mexico, underpasses have been used to protect jaguars from traffic. Natural bridges in Peru have helped animals pass over natural gas pipelines. On Christmas Island, bridges have been built over roads to allow millions of red crabs to pass from the forest to the beaches.
- 5 In southern California, there have been signs of inbreeding among lions in the Santa Monica Mountains because busy freeways around Los Angeles have isolated populations with low genetic diversity. To help save the mountain lion population, an \$87m wildlife bridge is planned over the 101 highway, which would be the largest in the world.
- 6 "When habitat is isolated, it can have an impact on individual animals – they might not be able to find water or food. It can also have an impact on the genetic diversity of populations," says Mark Benson, a member of the human-wildlife coexistence team at Parks Canada.
- 7 The agency has overseen one of the most successful uses of wildlife bridges in the world in Banff National Park, Alberta. They installed seven overpasses and 41 underpasses on one section. A 2014 study found that fencing off roads and installing wildlife passes had maintained high genetic diversity in bear populations. Benson says the passes have led to a big fall in roadkill along the highway, as well as fewer human deaths from collisions with animals.
- 8 In the UK, Highways England is building wildlife bridges around the country, with more planned for future infrastructure work. But some conservationists warn not enough is being done in the UK. "We're a long way behind the rest of the world. In Europe, it's become second nature in some areas," says wildlife trust director Martin de Retuerto.
- 9 The trust wants to create a green bridge across the M3 at Twyford Down, one of the most controversial road schemes in English history, built in the 90s. The motorway cut the link between the South Downs National Park and a nature reserve that has rare butterflies and wildflowers.
- 10 Large protests against the scheme failed to stop construction but De Retuerto says they changed attitudes to environmental issues in the UK. For that reason alone, he says, a green bridge at Twyford Down could kickstart the nature recovery network. "If the Romanians can build green bridges for bison, we can build them for butterflies."

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3 Comprehension check

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Reindeer in Sweden travel west, to the mountains, at the end of summer. T / F
2. Lichen is important for reindeer, especially when the weather is bad. T / F
3. On Christmas Island, animals use wildlife crossings to pass over natural gas pipelines. T / F
4. Lions in the Santa Monica Mountains are showing signs of inbreeding. T / F
5. The largest wildlife bridge in the world will be in Canada. T / F
6. Wildlife passes in Canada have reduced the number of people killed in collisions with animals. T / F
7. The UK is leading the world in building wildlife bridges. T / F
8. The M3 motorway in England cut the link between a national park and a nature reserve. T / F

4 Using key language

Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to make expressions from the text.

- | | |
|-------------|--------------|
| 1. traffic | a. fires |
| 2. climate | b. reserve |
| 3. forest | c. nature |
| 4. genetic | d. jam |
| 5. nature | e. park |
| 6. national | f. diversity |
| 7. second | g. lands |
| 8. grazing | h. crisis |

5 Discussion

- Are wildlife crossings a good idea? Give reasons for your answer.
- Should there be more national parks and nature reserves? Explain your answer.
- Which is better for the environment – road travel or rail travel? Give reasons for your answer.

6 In your own words

Find more information online about an area of your country where animals are endangered by roads. Write a short paragraph to describe its location, the reasons for a wildlife crossing and the reasons against. Write 100–150 words.