

How Sal met Sally on The Big Night

It was the first warm night after a rain in Spring and love was in the air, if not love it was lust for Sal the salamander. His sense of smell picked up the scent of female salamanders in the area. It was the Big Night when there was a mass migration of salamanders to form a gathering called a congress whose sole purpose was mating. Unlike frogs which live in the water, most salamanders are terrestrial, and must abandon their solitary terrestrial existence to migrate to a quiet fresh water stream or pond to find a mate or two or three.

Sal's young friend Saul, being young and male was particularly anxious to meet a suitable female, actually any female. Saul could just sense the nearby pond and the females therein as he crawled out of his burrow under the rotting log. As soon as it was dark he was off in the direction of the pond. He made a quick stop when he hit the edge of the highway, but his hormones took over any caution and he threw caution to the wind and he took off across the busy road. He made it about halfway across before he became a splotch on the highway.

Sal, being older and wiser than Saul knew to follow a fence that led to a culvert that went under the road to enable him to cross safely and enjoy the sensual pleasures of the evening. Little did Sal know that the culvert under the road and fence that he followed were constructed by the humans of the community for the express purpose of safely allowing the salamanders and other small animals to cross the road.

According to some estimates, automobile collisions kill more than a million animals every day, making them the leading cause of death for



many vertebrate species. Still worse is the way major roads and other forms of development can subdivide animal populations and fragment their habitats. Losing access to large areas of their living space makes it much harder for many woodland creatures to forage for food, find mates and carry on their genetic legacies

If you are not concerned about saving small animals as they try to cross busy highways, you should be concerned about the 1.5 million accidents with 1.1 billion dollars in damages that have occurred by collisions with deer and other large animals in the U.S. On the average there are 29,000 injuries and 200 fatalities that have been caused by wildlife per year in the U.S. I personally came very close to becoming one of these statistics. I was coming down a long steep hill at about 30 miles per hour on my bicycle when a deer spring out of the woods about ten feet in front of me. There was barely time to react as the deer moved past within inches of my front wheel.

European countries including the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, and France have been using various crossing structures to reduce the conflict between wildlife and roads for several decades and use a variety of overpasses and underpasses to protect and re-establish wildlife such as: amphibians, badgers, ungulates, invertebrates, and other small mammals.

In the United States, thousands of wildlife crossings have been built in the past 30 years, including culverts, bridges, and overpasses. These have been used to protect mountain goats in Montana, spotted salamanders in Massachusetts, bighorn sheep in Colorado, desert tortoises in California, and endangered Florida panthers in Florida.

The benefits derived from constructing wildlife crossings to extend wildlife migration corridors over and under major roads appear to outweigh the costs of construction and maintenance. One study estimates that adding wildlife crossings to a road project is a 7–8% increase in the total cost of the project. Theoretically, the monetary costs associated with constructing and maintaining wildlife crossings in ecologically important areas are trumped by the benefits associated with protecting wildlife populations, reducing property damage to vehicles, and saving the lives of drivers and passengers by reducing the number of collisions caused by wildlife.

But I digressed. Thanks to the effort of the community to construct a safe highway crossing Sal met Sally and after a night of bliss about 100 fertilized eggs were laid and Sal and Sally's genetic legacy was passed on.

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