

When Animals are Hit-and-Run Victims

What You Can Do to Help

By Shelley Thayer, Executive Director, Cat Depot

One million animals are killed on our roads **every day**. This alarming statistic includes domestic dogs and cats, wild animals and birds.

Whether you see an animal that has been hit by a car or find one lying in the road, it is always an emotionally wrenching scenario. As a pet owner, it's common to think, "What if this were my animal?"

Accidents happen, and animals escape from their homes. Or, you may be helping an abandoned or stray animal. So, it's best to have a plan in place to offer assistance.

If the Animal is Deceased

Move your vehicle to the side of the road, away from traffic, and turn on your flashers. Being cautious of traffic, move the carcass to the side of the road, using gloves, a flattened box or a towel. Contact animal services to report the exact location for pick up.

Animal Services will scan the animal for a microchip, look up information on the animal's tags and contact the owner.

Carry a small shovel for rabbits, birds and small wildlife. Move the animals a safe distance from the road. By doing so, you will save the lives of birds and other animals who are searching for a meal.

Also, never touch the animal or wildlife without wearing gloves.

If the Animal is Injured and Alive

Turn on your flashers and pull safely to the side of the road. Signal to cars to slow traffic and prevent further injury to the animal. Hopefully, someone will pull over to help; if not, you'll be on your own.

With your own personal safety in mind, cautiously approach the animal. Remember, a sick or injured animal can behave unpredictably. A sudden move—even the opening of your car door—can cause a frightened animal to bolt into oncoming traffic. Speak in a reassuring and soothing voice, and move slowly, making sure the animal can see you at all times. Create a barrier between you and the animal by using a carrier or large towel, and assess the situation.

For wild animals or birds, call a local wildlife professional immediately. Even small animals can scratch, bite and injure you.

Be Prepared for a Roadside Emergency

To care for an injured or deceased animal that you find on the road, carry the following items in your trunk.

- A folded cardboard box (with holes) or a carrier (You can purchase a cat box for \$2.50 from Cat Depot)
- Garbage Bags
- Leather gloves
- Dog leash(es)
- A soft tie to use as a muzzle (only if you know how and when to muzzle)
- A blanket or large towel
- A pet first aid kit (not to be used in place of veterinary care)
- A small shovel

Store the following information in your cell phone:

- Sarasota County Animal Services - 941-861-9500
- Manatee County Animal Services- 941-742-5933
- The Wildlife Center of Venice - 941-484-9657
- Your Veterinarian's Phone Number
- Phone Numbers for Local Emergency Veterinary Clinics

Use Caution

Depending on the animal and the injury, use leather gloves, a large towel or blanket, a flat box or a folded box or carrier. For song birds, a paper bag may be used for transport. Cover the animal and slide or lift it into the box or carrier.

Do not give the animal food or water: it may cause him to choke. Many injured animals are in shock, and eating or drinking can make it worse.

During transport, turn the radio off, roll up your windows and keep conversation low and to a minimum.

When to Call for Back Up

If you are not able to safely remove the animal, call animal control or a local rescue agency. Provide precise information regarding road names, mile markers or landmarks. Stay on the scene, keeping an eye on the animal until help arrives.

If you place an unrestrained animal in your vehicle, call for back up. An injured dog may become frantic or aggressive. Cats may do the same or they may try to hide under the car seat. In this scenario, do not attempt to transport the animal, but wait for help to arrive.

If you can provide transport, take the injured animal to your veterinarian or an emergency clinic. Call ahead, if possible. Be prepared to pay for services. Should you decide, instead, to take the animal to animal services, please keep in mind that the facility may not be able to provide expensive surgery. In severe cases, animal services may humanely euthanize the animal to relieve his suffering. For minor injuries, the animal may be held for the mandated stray period.

What More Can You Do?

Use your cell phone to take photos of the animal's face and any distinguishing features. Take positive photos only. Use them to make signs to post in the area where the animal was injured. This will help the owner find his or her pet.

One Final Thought...

Think about your own animals. If they were victims of a hit-and-run driver, wouldn't you want a Good Samaritan to help them with veterinary care, as well as signage to find them? At the same time, be reasonable about what you can afford if an owner is never found.

Finally, no animal should ever be left to suffer. So, thank you for helping animals in need who have no other means of support. 🐾



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Dedicated to saving lives, Cat Depot, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) free-roaming facility, is recognized for its progressive design and commitment to helping homeless, abandoned and injured animals. Open seven days a week, Cat Depot is located at 2542 17th Street in Sarasota. For more information, call 941-366-2404, or visit Cat Depot online at www.CatDepot.org.