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Will It Work in Iowa?

The embankments of many Austrian highways today show on both sides of the road a new installation: game-warning reflectors which are designed to divert beams from car headlamps into the adjoining countryside. The basic idea for the installation of the reflectors has been derived from the studies of the Institute of Comparative Behavior Research in the Austrian Academy of Sciences, which concentrated on the effect on animals of "eyes" and "eye dummies". It was established in these studies most animals are deterred by the sight of "eyes" as they believe that they are looked upon and, consequently, feel threatened. On the other hand it turned out that the color "red" has an alarming effect as it is actually the most widely used "signal color" among animals. It was therefore concluded that the combined presentation of both effects, the threatening eye-effect and the alarming signal-effect, should cause game to shrink back from any approach immediately, thus stopping it on the roadside and preventing it from crossing the highway in front of traveling cars.

An optical concern made practical use of these findings and constructed red reflectors which, installed on wooden poles on both sides of highways, divert incident headlamp light into the adjoining countryside and thus cause the impression of flashing-up red eyes. As always several reflectors are exposed to headlamp light-beams at the same time, a traveling car at night will make a series of such "eyes" flash up simultaneously, so that the series of warning eyes will have practically the effect of a "barrage" fence. Even the first experimental installation of red-eye reflectors confirmed the usefulness of the device and proved the correctness of the Institute's conclusions. On the test-road sections surveyed it was possible immediately to attain an average reduction of nightly wildlife accidents by about 80 per cent. Similar successes were meanwhile registered on all Austrian highways equipped with game-warning reflector systems. In view of the low cost of the device and its installation it is expected that more and more roads in Austria will be made "safe" in the future, and the model of the Austrian roads may in due course also influence practice elsewhere.

Information Report, Animal Welfare Institute. 24(2):2-4.