

ANIMAL MOVEMENT

Behavioral responses of terrestrial mammals to COVID-19 lockdowns

Marlee A. Tucker^{1*}, Aafke M. Schipper¹, Tempe S. F. Adams², Nina Attias^{3,4}, Tal Avgar⁵, Natarsha L. Babic⁶, Kristin J. Barker⁷, Guillaume Bastille-Rousseau⁸, Dominik M. Behr^{9,10}, Jerrold L. Belant¹¹, Dean E. Beyer Jr.¹¹, Niels Blaum¹², J. David Blount¹³, Dirk Bockmühl¹⁴, Ricardo Luiz Pires Boulhosa¹⁵, Michael B. Brown^{16,17}, Bayarbaatar Buuveibaatar¹⁸, Francesca Cagnacci¹⁹, Justin M. Calabrese^{20,21}, Rok Černe²², Simon Chamaille-Jammes^{23,24}, Aung Nyein Chan^{25,17}, Michael J. Chase², Yannick Chaval^{26,27}, Yvette Chenaux-Ibrahim²⁸, Seth G. Cherry²⁹, Duško Ćirović³⁰, Emrah Çoban³¹, Eric K. Cole³², Laura Conlee³³, Alyson Courtemanch³⁴, Gabriele Cozzi^{9,10}, Sarah C. Davidson^{35,36,37}, Darren DeBloois³⁸, Nandintsetseg Dejid³⁹, Vickie DeNicola⁴⁰, Arnaud L. J. Desbiez^{3,41,42}, Iain Douglas-Hamilton^{43,44}, David Drake⁴⁵, Michael Egan^{8,27}, Jasper A.J. Eikelboom⁴⁶, William F. Fagan²¹, Morgan J. Farmer⁴⁷, Julian Fennessy¹⁶, Shannon P. Finnegan⁴⁸, Christen H. Fleming^{21,49}, Bonnie Fournier⁵⁰, Nicholas L. Fowler^{48,51}, Mariela G. Gantchoff^{52,53}, Alexandre Garnier^{26,54}, Benedikt Gehr⁵⁵, Chris Geremia⁵⁶, Jacob R. Goheen⁵⁷, Morgan L. Hauptfleisch⁵⁸, Mark Hebblewhite⁵⁹, Morten Heim⁶⁰, Anne G. Hertel⁶¹, Marco Heurich^{62,63,64}, A. J. Mark Hewison^{26,27}, James Hodson⁶⁵, Nicholas Hoffman⁶⁶, J. Grant C. Hopcraft⁶⁷, Djuro Huber⁶⁸, Edmund J. Isaac²⁸, Karolina Janik⁶⁹, Miloš Ježek⁷⁰, Örjan Johansson^{71,72}, Neil R. Jordan^{73,74,10}, Petra Kaczensky^{75,76}, Douglas N. Kamaru^{57,77}, Matthew J. Kauffman⁷⁸, Todd M. Kautz⁴⁸, Roland Kays^{79,80}, Allicia P. Kelly⁸¹, Jonas Kindberg^{82,83}, Miha Krofel^{84,85}, Josip Kusak⁶⁸, Clayton T. Lamb⁸⁶, Tayler N. LaSharr⁸⁷, Peter Leimgruber¹⁷, Horst Leitner⁸⁸, Michael Lierz⁸⁹, John D.C. Linnell^{60,90}, Purejav Lkhagvaja⁹¹, Ryan A. Long⁹², José Vicente López-Bao⁹³, Matthias-Claudio Loretto^{35,94,95}, Pascal Marchand⁹⁶, Hans Martin⁵⁹, Lindsay A. Martinez⁹⁷, Roy T. McBride Jr.⁹⁸, Ashley A.D. McLaren^{99,100}, Erling Meisingset¹⁰¹, Joerg Melzheimer¹⁴, Evelyn H. Merrill¹⁰², Arthur D. Middleton¹⁰³, Kevin L. Monteith⁸⁷, Seth A. Moore²⁸, Bram Van Moorter⁶⁰, Nicolas Morellet^{26,27}, Thomas Morrison⁶⁷, Rebekka Müller¹⁴, Atle Mysterud¹⁰³, Michael J. Noonan¹⁰⁴, David O'Connor^{105,106,107}, Daniel Olson³⁸, Kirk A. Olson¹⁰⁸, Anna C. Ortega^{109,110}, Federico Ossli¹⁹, Manuela Panzacchi⁶⁰, Robert Patchett¹¹¹, Brent R. Patterson^{112,113}, Rogério Cunha de Paula¹¹⁴, John Payne¹¹⁵, Wilke Peters¹¹⁶, Tyler R. Petroelje⁴⁸, Benjamin J. Pitcher^{74,117}, Boštjan Pokorny^{118,119,120}, Kim Poole¹²¹, Hubert Potočník¹²², Marie-Pier Poulin¹²³, Robert M. Pringle¹²⁴, Herbert H.T. Prins¹²⁵, Nathan Ranc^{19,126,26}, Slaven Reljić^{68,127}, Benjamin Robb¹⁰⁹, Ralf Röder¹⁴, Christer M. Rolandsen⁶⁰, Christian Rutz¹¹¹, Albert R. Salemgareyev¹²⁸, Gustaf Samelius^{72,129}, Heather Sayine-Crawford⁶⁵, Sarah Schooler⁴⁸, Çağan H. Şekercioglu^{130,131}, Nuria Selva^{131,132}, Paola Semenzato^{133,139}, Agnieszka Sergiel¹³¹, Koustubh Sharma^{134,135,136,137}, Avery L. Shawler⁷, Johannes Signer¹³⁸, Václav Silovsky⁷⁰, João Paulo Silva^{142,143,144}, Richard Simon¹⁴¹, Rachel A. Smiley⁸⁷, Douglas W. Smith⁵⁶, Erling J. Solberg⁶⁰, Diego Ellis-Soto¹⁴⁵, Orr Spiegel¹⁴⁵, Jared Stabach¹⁷, Jenna Stacy-Dawes¹⁴⁶, Daniel R. Stahler⁵⁶, John Stephenson¹⁴⁷, Cheyenne Stewart¹⁴⁸, Olav Strand⁶⁰, Peter Sunde¹⁴⁹, Nathan J. Svoboda¹⁵⁰, Jonathan Swart¹⁵¹, Jeffrey J. Thompson^{152,153}, Katrina L. Toal¹⁴¹, Kenneth Uiseb¹⁵⁴, Meredith C. VanAcker^{155,17}, Mariana Velilla^{152,153,156}, Tana L. Verzuh⁸⁷, Bettina Wachter¹⁴, Brittany L. Wagler⁸⁷, Jesse Whittington¹⁵⁷, Martin Wikelski^{35,158}, Christopher C. Wilmer¹⁵⁹, George Wittemyer^{160,43}, Julie K. Young^{161,162}, Filip Zięba¹⁶³, Tomasz Zwijacz-Kozica¹⁶³, Mark A. J. Huijbregts¹, Thomas Mueller^{39,164,17}

COVID-19 lockdowns in early 2020 reduced human mobility, providing an opportunity to disentangle its effects on animals from those of landscape modifications. Using GPS data, we compared movements and road avoidance of 2300 terrestrial mammals (43 species) during the lockdowns to the same period in 2019. Individual responses were variable with no change in average movements or road avoidance behavior, likely due to variable lockdown conditions. However, under strict lockdowns 10-day 95th percentile displacements increased by 73%, suggesting increased landscape permeability. Animals' 1-hour 95th percentile displacements declined by 12% and animals were 36% closer to roads in areas of high human footprint, indicating reduced avoidance during lockdowns. Overall, lockdowns rapidly altered some spatial behaviors, highlighting variable but substantial impacts of human mobility on wildlife worldwide.

In 2020, governments around the world introduced lockdown measures in an attempt to curb the spread of the novel severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS CoV-2) virus. This resulted in a drastic reduction in human mobility including human confinement to living quarters, closure of recreation and protected areas, and reductions in the movement of vehicles and their associated by-products (e.g., noise and pol-

lutants) (1). This “anthropause” provides a unique opportunity to quantify the effects of human mobility on wildlife by decoupling these from landscape modification effects (e.g., roads) (2, 3). It is established that anthropogenic landscape modifications affect how animals use habitats (4) and interact with each other (5). For example, human infrastructure may induce various behavioral responses in animals, including avoidance (6), shifts in

movement speed or habitat selection (7), roads (7), and altered diurnal patterns of habitat use (8). In addition to these landscape modification effects, animals can react directly to the presence and activity of humans (9). These often are perceived as a risk (10), which can lead to changes in habitat use due to the avoidance of areas heavily used by humans, increased energetic costs and physiological stress (11), and altered demography (e.g., reduced fecundity) (12). As large-scale, high-resolution human mobility data are rare, our ability to decouple the effects of landscape modification and human mobility has been limited. In particular, little is known about the overall impact of human mobility on terrestrial mammalian behavior across species and continents. Here, we make use of the quasi-experimental alteration of human mobility during COVID-19 lockdowns in early 2020 to study the effect of human mobility on animal behavior, specifically on movement and road avoidance in terrestrial mammals.

Using animal tracking data to study behavioral changes during lockdowns

We used global positioning system (GPS) tracking data to evaluate how 2300 individual terrestrial mammals, representing 43 species across 76 studies (Fig. 1 and table S1), changed their spatial behavior during the initial 2020 COVID-19 lockdowns compared with the same time period a year earlier. For the initial 2020 lockdown period we included the date of the first government-mandated lockdown in each study area (between 1 February and 28 April, 2020) until 15 May, 2020. We used matching time periods from 2019 as a baseline for comparison. Individuals were tracked for an average of 59 days per observation period (range: 10 to 72 days). We focused on two behaviors: displacement distance (straight-line distance between two consecutive GPS locations) and distance to the nearest road. As changes in displacement might be scale-dependent, we considered displacements at 1-hour and 10-day intervals based on Tucker *et al.* (13). Changes in 1-hour displacements reflect immediate responses to altered human mobility (14). We expected that reduced human mobility during strict lockdowns would lead to an overall reduction in 1-hour displacements due to fewer avoidance and escape responses, or easier access to foraging areas due to reduced disturbance as has been previously shown for red deer (14). For the 10-day displacements, we expected a different response because previous analyses of the effects of land-modifications on mammal movements (13) have shown longer displacement distances in areas with low human footprint. Accordingly, displacement distances

Affiliations are listed at the end of this Research Article.

*Corresponding author. Email: marlee.tucker@ru.nl



at the 10-day scale might be longer under lockdown conditions as animals might be able to cross barriers linked to human mobility during such periods (e.g., roads with lower traffic volumes). For each time scale, we evaluated the 50th (median) and 95th percentiles of the displacements. Median displacements represent a suite of behaviors including resting and sleeping (1-hour scale) or residency in the same area (10-day scale). The 95th percentile eliminates stationary behaviors and represents longer and more directed movements such as avoidance behaviors on the 1-hour time scale and long-distance displacements at the 10-day time scale (13). Because longer displacements generally have a greater probability of encountering humans or infrastructure, we expected stronger responses for the 95th-percentile displacements.

Although roads may benefit some species by providing foraging opportunities or movement corridors (15), their effects are more often negative as they not only create barriers but also increase mortality and facilitate human access to remote areas (16). We expected that declines in vehicular traffic during the early 2020 lockdowns (17) would reduce the perceived risk level and mammals would therefore be closer to roads.

To evaluate possible changes in displacements or distance to the nearest roads between the lockdown and baseline periods, we calculated log response ratios for each measure (medians and 95th percentiles of the 1-hour and 10-day displacements, and distance to roads) and each individual. Our analyses of the response ratios involved a two-step process following previous work (18). First, we used Bayesian mixed-effects models to examine the overall effect of lockdowns on movement distance and distance to the nearest road (i.e., intercept-only model) (19). Second, we used Bayesian mixed-effects models to examine possible relationships between the response ratios and various covariates indicative of environmental context (i.e., lockdown strictness, human footprint, and productivity) and species traits (i.e., body mass, diet, activity, and relative brain size) (19). For both steps of the analyses, we included random effects for species-study combined to account for nonindependence between effect sizes from the same study and/or species. For the second step of the analysis, we included the Oxford COVID-19 government response tracker stringency index (SI) (20) in our models to examine country-level variation in lockdown strictness, ranging from 0 (no lockdown) to 100 (very strict lockdown; e.g., confined to home). We used the human footprint index [(HFI) 1-km resolution] (21) as a proxy of direct and indirect human activities including roads, agriculture, and human population density. The HFI values range from 0 to 50, where low values represent areas rela-

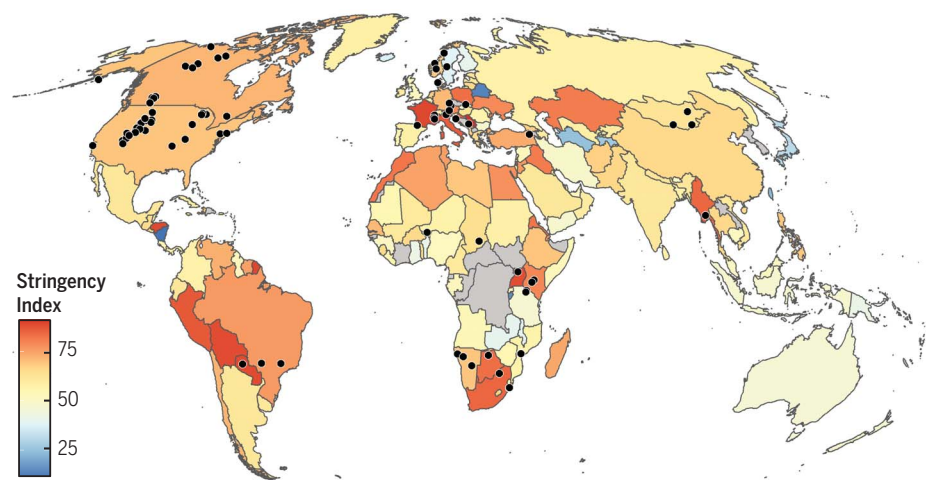
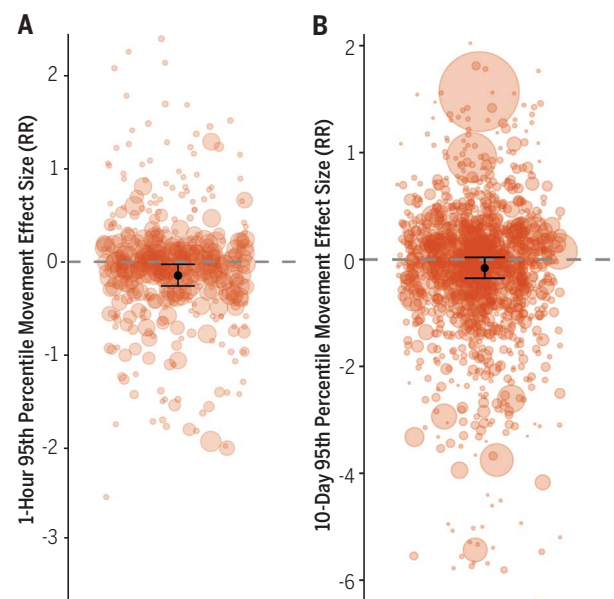


Fig. 1. Distribution of GPS data from 43 terrestrial mammal species. The map represents the mean Oxford COVID-19 government response tracker stringency index (SI) (20), which measures lockdown strictness, ranging from 0 (no lockdown) to 100 (very strict lockdown). Values are presented per country during the 2020 study period (i.e., initial lockdown date to 15 May, 2020), where higher values (red) represent countries with a stricter lockdown policy. Light gray represents countries with no SI data. SI values range from 10 to 92. Black points represent the centroids of each study-species combination ($n = 90$). Map in Mollweide projection.

Fig. 2. Changes in 1-hour animal movement during the COVID-19 lockdowns. (A) Overall reduction in the 1-hour 95th-percentile displacements (intercept-only model). (B) Overall reduction in the 10-day 95th-percentile displacements (intercept-only model). Colored points represent individuals ($n = 423$ and 1725), with point sizes proportional to the inverse sampling variance of the response ratio for each individual. The black points and error bars indicate the overall effect with 95% CI. The 1-hour 95% CI do not overlap 0 (-0.25 to -0.01) but the 10-day CI did overlap 0 (-0.36 to 0.05). Negative values indicate reduced movement distances during the early 2020 lockdowns whereas positive values indicate increased movement distances during the lockdowns.



tively undisturbed by humans and high values represent areas with high human development levels. We expected stronger behavioral responses to lockdowns in areas with a higher human footprint and in countries with stricter lockdowns for both displacement distances and distance to roads. To account for movement capacity, differences in movements related to diet, activity cycle, and behavioral flexibility, we included body mass (range: 10 to 4000 kg), diet (carnivore, omnivore, herbivore), activity (diurnal or nocturnal), and relative brain size as additional explanatory variables. Finally, we

also included the between-year difference in normalized difference vegetation index (NDVI) between 2019 and 2020 to account for potential differences in seasonality and productivity. We fit models for the median and 95th percentile of the 1-hour and 10-day displacements, and for distance to roads including all covariates for lockdown strictness, environmental context, and species traits (19). We report our results as the percentage increase or decrease in movement distance or distance to roads by back-transforming the response ratios (19) and reporting the 95% credible intervals (CI).

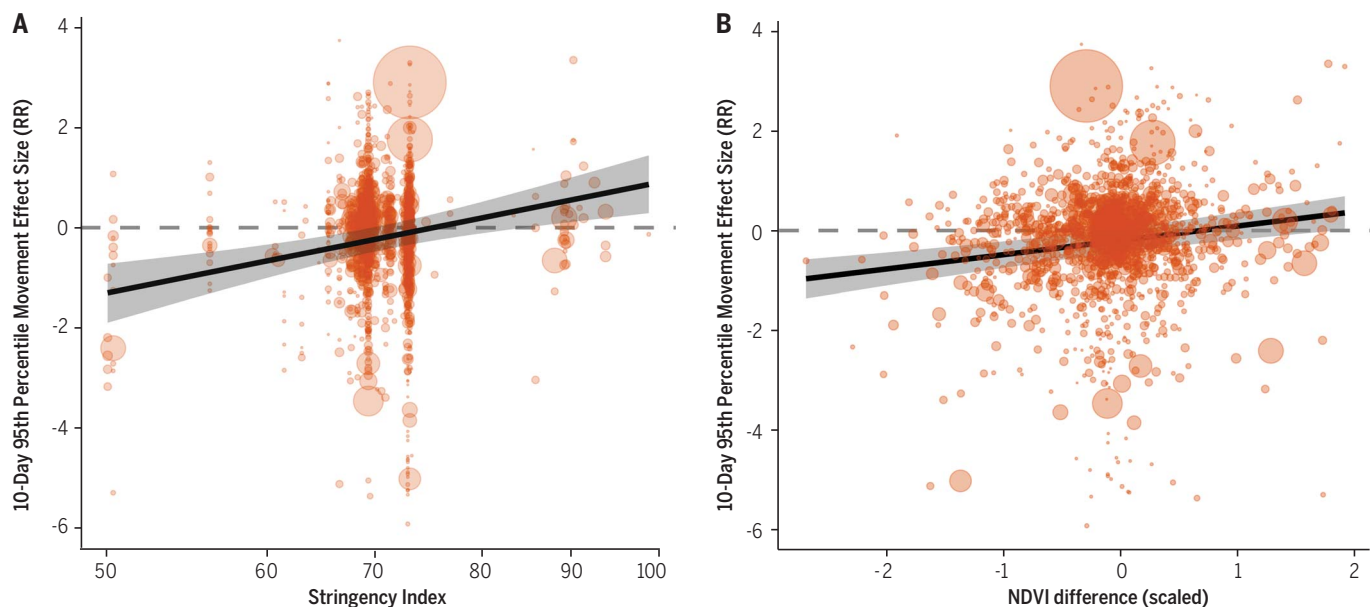


Fig. 3. Changes in 10-day animal movement during the COVID-19 lockdowns. (A) Increasing 10-day 95th-percentile displacements in response to the Stringency Index and (B) 10-day 95th-percentile displacements were longer during 2020 when we observed higher NDVI values compared with 2019. Colored points represent individuals ($n = 1725$), with point size proportional to the inverse sampling variance

of the response ratio for each individual. The black line is the fitted effect size (response ratio; RR). The shaded area indicates 95% CI, and the dashed gray line at zero illustrates no change. Negative values indicate reduced movement distances during the early 2020 lockdowns whereas positive values indicate increased movement distances during the lockdowns.

Changes in movement displacements during lockdowns

We found an average 12% reduction in 1-hour 95th-percentile displacements when evaluating the impact of only the lockdown itself (intercept-only model, 95% CI: 1 and 22%, Fig. 2 and table S2). This may indicate reduced avoidance and escape behavior of humans (e.g., no need to travel longer distances to avoid humans) (22, 23) as a result of altered human mobility levels during lockdowns. When exploring potential correlates of this response, no covariates had an effect that differed from zero (table S3). For the 1-hour median displacements, we found no overall effect (table S2) and again, no effect of the covariates (table S4). Taken together, these results suggest that responses at the 1-hour scale were highly variable and not dependent on the selected species traits (body mass, diet, activity, or relative brain size) or on the variables describing the local context (lockdown stringency or HFI).

The overall lockdown response was not different from zero for the 10-day 95th-percentile or long-distance displacements (15%, 95% CI: -30 to 5%; Fig. 2B and table S2). However, when exploring the covariates that might explain variation in response ratios the 95% CI of the stringency index did not overlap zero (table S5), with displacements increasing 73% on average in areas of stricter lockdown (i.e., areas with an SI of 90; Fig. 3A). This may indicate that tighter restrictions on human movements, including confinement to living

spaces and reduced human mobility in green spaces (e.g., Italy and France; Fig. 1) led to increased landscape permeability for mammals. This effect of human mobility is similar in magnitude to previous work that used the same displacement metric but examined the effect of permanent landscape alterations (land conversion and infrastructure) on terrestrial mammal movements (13). Although this work used a spatial comparison rather than comparing changes over time within the same individuals, they found a decline of 67% of the 10-day 95th-percentile displacements in areas where the human footprint is high (13). We found no effect of the remaining covariates (HFI, body mass, diet, activity, or relative brain size) (table S5).

We found that the 10-day 95th-percentile displacements in areas with lower lockdown stringency (SI values 50 to 70) were actually shorter (on average 22 to 72%) during the lockdown than in 2019 (Fig. 3A). The reduction in movement may reflect increased human mobility in seminatural areas such as parks and other green spaces (24, 25). In fact, green space use by people in some areas of intermediate lockdown increased up to 350% (25). In addition to the lockdown effects, seasonality played a role in determining 10-day movement distances. The 10-day median (fig. S1) and 95th percentile (Fig. 3B) displacements were longer during 2020, when we observed higher NDVI values compared with 2019, which may have led some individuals to begin their spring migration or reproduction earlier in

2020. For the 10-day median displacements, we found no overall lockdown effect (table S2), no effect of lockdown stringency, and no effects of the other covariates (HFI, body mass, diet, activity, or relative brain size) (table S6). This difference in responses between 95% and median movements suggests that lockdown stringency may have affected mainly wide-ranging behavior such as migratory movements, long-distance dispersal, exploratory excursions, or long displacements within individuals' home ranges.

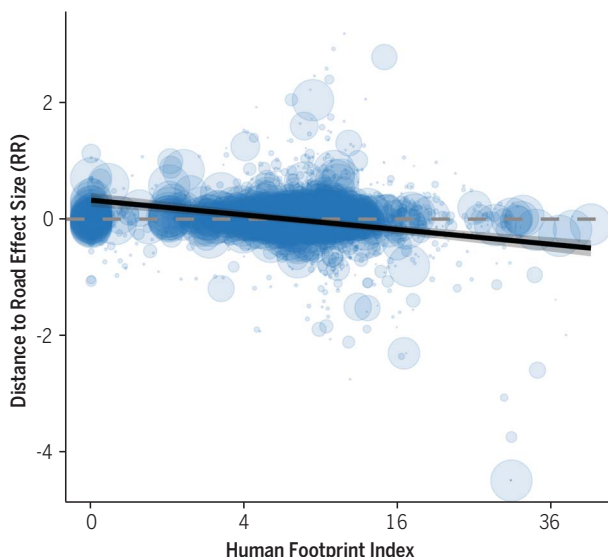
Mammals were closer to roads during lockdowns

We found no overall lockdown response in the distance of individuals to roads (-1%, 95% CI: -5 to 3%, table S2) nor a relationship with the Stringency Index, NDVI difference, or species traits (table S7). However, the response ratios were negatively related to HFI, showing that animals in areas with a high human footprint were on average 36% closer to roads during lockdown (HFI = 36, Fig. 4). In many parts of the world, traffic volume was substantially reduced during lockdowns (26, 27), which in turn lessened the impact of roads on animals, including reduced barrier effects (15, 28) and road-kill numbers (17, 29). Our findings add context to these previous results by demonstrating that not only were road-kill numbers lower during lockdown (17, 29), but also animals were closer on average to roads in human-modified areas, indicating reduced avoidance.

Overall, we detected three main signals of a lockdown effect on terrestrial mammal behavior;

Fig. 4. Changes in animal distance to roads during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

Decreasing distance to roads in response to the human footprint index (HFI). Colored points represent individuals ($n = 2160$), with point size proportional to the inverse sampling variance of the response ratio for each individual. The black line is the predicted effect size (response ratio; RR). The shaded area indicates 95% CI, and the dashed gray line at zero illustrates no change. Negative values indicate closer proximity to roads during the early 2020 lockdowns, whereas positive values indicate increased distance from roads during the lockdowns.



although they were heterogeneously distributed across species and populations. These were (i) reductions in 1-hour 95th-percentile displacements suggesting relaxed avoidance behavior, reduced disturbance, and/or fewer escape responses, (ii) increased 10-day 95th-percentile displacements under strict lockdown conditions, suggesting increased landscape permeability, and (iii) closer proximity to roads in areas heavily used by humans, suggesting a reduction in traffic disturbance. A number of species-specific case studies are consistent with these findings. For example, evidence suggests that during the lockdowns, mountain lions' (*Puma concolor*) usual aversion to urban edges ceased (9), crested porcupine (*Hystrix cristata*) abundance increased in urban areas (30), diurnal activity of invasive Eastern cottontails (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) increased (30), and brown bears (*Ursus arctos*) exploited novel connectivity corridors (12).

Despite these three general responses to the lockdowns considerable variation in responses existed across species and study regions (Fig. 2). This variability highlights that lockdown impacts are highly context-dependent. For example, mountain lions explored more urban areas during the lockdown whereas other species including American black bears (*Ursus americanus*), bobcats (*Lynx rufus*), and coyotes (*Canis latrans*) in the same areas did not (31). In addition, in our study lockdown stringency was only measured at the country level and did not account for local variability in restrictions. We also note that our data were predominantly from Europe and North America so our results should be interpreted with caution for other regions. Finally, we note that a given movement metric could capture different behaviors in different species, especially at the 10-day scale, whereas displacements could

capture behaviors ranging from within home range movements to dispersal.

We show that human mobility is a key driver of some terrestrial mammal behaviors, with a magnitude potentially similar to that of landscape modifications. Therefore, when evaluating human impacts on animal behavior or designing mitigation measures both physical landscape alteration and human mobility should be taken into consideration [see also (32)]. Disentangling the effects of human mobility and landscape modification will allow the implementation of conservation measures specifically targeted at mitigating the impacts of human mobility, such as enticements to adjust timing, frequency, and volume of traffic in areas important for animal movement. Mammals have been living with human disturbance for a long time, but we demonstrate that many wildlife populations retain the capacity to respond to changes in human behavior; providing a positive outlook for future mitigation strategies designed to maintain animal movement and the ecosystem functions they provide.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank numerous people helping with fieldwork including the Ktunaxa Nation for their support of the Elk Valley grizzly bear collaring project, NP Tara (brown bear research), Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute and Tanzania National Parks, the leadership of Gorongosa National Park for allowing and facilitating research on spiral-horned antelope, the farmers of the Seels, Hochfeld, and Awas Oanob Conservancies for collaboration and the Namibian Ministry of Environment, Forestry, and Tourism. We also thank all in Madison, WI, USA, who support the UW Urban Canid Project. Collaring of khulan in Mongolia's South Gobi Region was conducted within the framework of the Oyu Tolgoi LLC (OT) Core Biodiversity Monitoring Program, implemented by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) through a cooperative agreement with Sustainability East Asia LLC (SEA). We thank the field team from Tatra National Park (Poland). We want to thank the Mongolian Ministry of Nature, Environment, and Tourism and staff from WCS, OT, SEA, and protected areas for the logistical and practical support during khulan capture. A.K., J.H., B.F., and H.S.C. wish to thank the Indigenous governments and organizations across the Northwest Territories' boreal and barren-ground caribou ranges for their support of caribou monitoring programs. We wish to thank G. Mowat and L. Smit for their support on the Elk Valley grizzly bear collaring project. We thank Save the Elephants and the Welgevonden Game Reserve for their elephant tracking data. We thank the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapahoe Fish and Game Department and the Wyoming State Veterinary Laboratory for assistance with the Wyoming bighorn sheep project. The Afognak and Sitkalidak islands elk and bear project was implemented through a cooperative effort of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Kodiak Brown Bear Trust, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Koniag Native Corporation, Old Harbor Native Corporation, Afognak Native Corporation, Ouzinkie Native Corporation, Natives of Kodiak Native Corporation and the State University of New York, College of Environmental Science and Forestry. We also thank four anonymous reviewers for comments on the manuscript.

Funding: Supported by the Radboud Excellence Initiative (to M.T.), the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research [MORESTEP, 01LC1710A and 01LC1820A (to T.M. and N.D.)], the National Science Foundation [IIBR 1915347 (to J.M.C., C.H.F., and W.F.F.)], Serbian Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development [451-03-68/2022-14/ 200178 (to D.C.)], Dutch Research Council NWO program "Advanced Instrumentation for Wildlife Protection" (to H.H.T.P. and J.A.J.E.), Fondation Segré, RZSS, IPE, Greensboro Science Center, Houston Zoo, Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens, Nashville Zoo, Naples Zoo, Reid Park Zoo, Miller Park, WWF, ZOOG, Zoo Miami, Zoo Miami Foundation, Beauval Nature, Greenville Zoo, Riverbanks zoo and

garden, SAC Zoo, La Passarelle Conservation, Parc Animalier d'Auvergne, Disney Conservation Fund, Fresno Chaffee zoo, Play for nature, North Florida Wildlife Center, Abilene Zoo, a Libero Ero Fellowship (to C.T.L.), the Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program, Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, Teck Coal (to K.P.), and the Grand Teton Association. The collection of Norwegian moose data was funded by the Norwegian Environment Agency, the German Ministry of Education and Research via the SPACES II project ORYCS [FKZ-01LL1804A (to N.B.)], the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Wyoming Game and Fish Commission, Bureau of Land Management, Muley Fanatic Foundation (including Southwest, Kemmerer, Upper Green, and Blue Ridge Chapters), Boone and Crockett Club, Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resources Trust, Knobloch Family Foundation, Wyoming Animal Damage Management Board, Wyoming Governor's Big Game License Coalition, Bowhunters of Wyoming, Wyoming Outfitters and Guides Association, Pope and Young Club, US Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation, Wild Sheep Foundation, Wyoming Wildlife/Livestock Disease Research Partnership, the US National Science Foundation [IOS-1656642 and IOS-1656527 (to R.A.L. and R.M.P.)], the Spanish Ministry of Economy, Industry and Competitiveness [RYC-2015-18932; CGL2017-87528-R AEI/FEDER EU (to J.V.L.B.)], and by a GRUPIN research grant from the Regional Government of Asturias [IDI/2021/000075 (to J.V.L.B.)], Sigrid Rausing Trust, Batubay Özkan, Barbara Watkins, NSERC Discovery Grant [RGPIN-2021-02758 (to M.J.N.)], the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration act under Pittman-Robertson project [AKW-12 (to N.J.S.)], the State University of New York, College of Environmental Science and Forestry, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport of the Czech Republic [CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/16.019/0000803; CZ.02.2.69/0.0/0.0/19.073/0016944 (to M.J., M.S.P., and V.S.)], the Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic [QK1910462 (to M.J., M.S.P., and V.S.)], Rufford Foundation [grant 29681-1 (to D.N.K.)], an American Society of Mammalogists African Graduate Student Research Fund (to D.N.K.), the German Science Foundation [HE 8857/1-1 (to A.G.H.)], the Israeli Science Foundation [grant 396/20 (to O.S.)], the BSF-NSF [2019822 and IOS2015662 (to O.S.)], the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food and Slovenian Research Agency (CRP V1-1626), the Aage V. Jensen Naturfond (project: Kronvildt - viden, værdier og værktøjer), the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) upon Germany's Excellence Strategy [EXC 2117 – 422037984 (to M.W.)], National Centre for Research and Development in Poland POLNOR/198352/85/2013 (project GLOBE), the Slovenian Research Agency [P4-0059 and N1-0163 (to M.K.)], the David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation, Disney Conservation Fund, Whitley Fund for Nature, Acton Family Giving, Zoo Basel, Columbus, Bioparc de Doué-la-Fontaine, Zoo Dresden, Zoo Idaho, Kolmården Zoo, Korkeasaari Zoo, La Passarelle, Zoo New England, Tierpark Berlin, Tulsa Zoo, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Government of Mongolia, the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration act and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the National Science Foundation [LTREB 1556248 and 2038704 9 (to M.H., E.H.M., and H.M.)], Parks Canada, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, Alberta Environment and Parks, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Safari Club International and Alberta Conservation Association, the Consejo Nacional de Ciencias y Tecnología (CONACYT) of Paraguay [14-INV-208 and PRONII], the Norwegian Environment Agency and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, EU funded Interreg SI-HR 410 Carnivora Dinarica project, Paklenica and Plitvice Lakes National Parks, UK Wolf Conservation Trust, EURONATUR and Bernd Thies Foundation, the Messerli Foundation in Switzerland and WWF Germany, the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions [grant agreement 798091 (to M.-C.L.)], NASA Ecological Forecasting Program [80NSSC21K182], the Eototelemetry company (to S.C.-J.), the French National Research Agency (to S.C.-J.), LANDTHIRST [ANR-16-CE02-0001-01 (to S.C.-J.)], grant REPOS awarded by the i-Site MUSE thanks to the "Investissements d'avenir" program [ANR-16-IDEX-0006 (to S.C.-J.)], the ANR Mov-It project [ANR-16-CE02-0010 (to A.J.M.H. and N.M.)], the USDA Hatch Act Formula Funding (MSN201473), the Fondation Segre and North American and European Zoos listed at <http://www.giantanteater.org/>, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (to D.O., T.A., and J.K.Y.), the Yellowstone Forever and the National Park Service (to D.R.S., D.W.S., and C.G.), Missouri Department of Conservation, Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Grant PROJECT MO W103-R1, and State University of New York SNFS [31003A_182286 and 310030_204478 (to G.C.)], various donors to the Botswana Predator Conservation Program (to G.C.), data from collared caribou in the Northwest Territories (to A.P.K., J.H., B.F.,

and H.S.C.) were made available through funds from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Government of the Northwest Territories. The European Research Council Horizon2020 [AfricanBioServices 641918], the British Ecological Society, the Paul Jones Family Trust, and the Lord Kelvin Adam Smith fund, the Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute and Tanzania National Parks (to J.G.C.H. and T.M.). The Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapahoe Fish and Game Department and the Wyoming State Veterinary Laboratory, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Kodiak Brown Bear Trust, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Koniag Native Corporation, Old Harbor Native Corporation, Afognak Native Corporation, Ouzinkie Native Corporation, Natives of Kodiak Native Corporation and the State University of New York, College of Environmental Science and Forestry, and the Slovenia Hunters Association and Slovenia Forest Service. F.C. was partly supported by the Resident Visiting Researcher Fellowship, IMeRA/Aix-Marseille Université, Marseille. This work was partially funded by the Center of Advanced Systems Understanding (CASUS), which is financed by Germany's Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and by the Saxon Ministry for Science, Culture and Tourism (SMWK) with tax funds on the basis of the budget approved by the Saxon State Parliament. This article is a contribution of the COVID-19 Bio-Logging Initiative, which is funded in part by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation (GBMF9881) and the National Geographic Society (NGS-82515R-20) (both grants to C.R.). **Author contributions:** M.A.T. and T.M. conceived the manuscript; M.A.T. conducted the analyses and M.A.T. and T.M. wrote the first manuscript draft. Co-authors contributed data and assisted with writing the final version of the manuscript. **Competing Interests:** H.H.T.P. is a Member of the Weigelvonden Scientific Advisory Committee and A.D.M. is a Senior Advisor for Wildlife Conservation for the US Department of Agriculture. C.R. is the President of the International Bio-Logging Society, a member of an expert group providing advice on animal culture and social complexity to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), and member of the advisory committee of a WILDLABS research program aimed at identifying research and funding priorities in movement ecology. **Data and materials availability:** The full dataset used in the final analyses (33) and associated code (34) are available at Dryad. A subset of the spatial coordinate datasets is available at Zenodo (35). Certain datasets of spatial coordinates will be available only through requests made to the authors due to conservation and Indigenous sovereignty concerns (see table S1 for more information on data use restrictions and contact information for data requests). These sensitive data will be made available upon request to qualified researchers for research purposes, provided that the data use will not threaten the study populations, such as by distribution or publication of the coordinates or detailed maps. Some datasets, such as those overseen by government agencies, have additional legal restrictions on data sharing, and researchers may need to formally apply for data access. Collaborations with data holders are generally encouraged, and in cases where data are held by Indigenous groups or institutions from regions that are under-represented in the global science community, collaboration may be required to ensure inclusion. **License information:** Copyright © 2023 the authors, some rights reserved; exclusive licensee American Association for the Advancement of Science. No claim to original US government works. <https://www.sciencemag.org/about/science-licenses-journal-article-reuse>

¹Department of Environmental Science, Radboud Institute for Biological and Environmental Sciences, Radboud University, P.O. Box 9010, 6500, GL Nijmegen, Netherlands. ²Elephants Without Borders, P.O. Box 682, Kasane, Botswana. ³Instituto de Conservação de Animais Silvestres (ICAS), Campo Grande, Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil. ⁴Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, USA. ⁵Department of Wildland Resources and the Ecology Center, Utah State University, Logan, UT 84322, USA. ⁶School of Biological Sciences, Monash University, Clayton, Victoria 3800, Australia. ⁷Department of Environmental Science, Policy, and Management, University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, CA 94720, USA. ⁸Cooperative Wildlife Research Laboratory, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL, 62901, USA. ⁹Department of Evolutionary Biology and Environmental Studies, University of Zurich, Winterthurerstrasse 190, CH - 8057 Zurich, Switzerland. ¹⁰Botswana Predator Conservation, Private Bag 13, Maun, Botswana. ¹¹Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, Michigan State University, 480 Wilson Road, East Lansing, MI 48824, USA. ¹²University of Potsdam, Plant Ecology and Nature Conservation, Am Mühlenberg 3, 14476 Potsdam, Germany. ¹³School of Biological Sciences, University of Utah, 257 S 1400 E, Salt Lake City, UT 84112, USA. ¹⁴Department of Evolutionary Ecology, Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research, Alfred-Kowalle-Str. 17, 10315 Berlin,

Germany. ¹⁵Instituto Pró-Carnívoros, Atibaia, SP, 12945010 Brazil. ¹⁶Giraffe Conservation Foundation, Eros, PO Box 86099, Windhoek, Namibia. ¹⁷Smithsonian National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute, Conservation Ecology Center, 1500 Remount Rd, Front Royal, VA, 22630, USA. ¹⁸Wildlife Conservation Society, Mongolia Program, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. ¹⁹Animal Ecology Unit, Research and Innovation Centre, Fondazione Edmund Mach, Via E. Mach 1, 38010 San Michele all'Adige, Italy. ²⁰Center for Advanced Systems Understanding (CASUS), Goerlitz, Germany. ²¹Department of Biology, University of Maryland, College Park, 4094 Campus Dr, College Park, MA, USA. ²²Slovenia Forest service, Večna pot 2, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia. ²³CEFE, CNRS, Univ Montpellier, EPHE, IRD, Montpellier, France. ²⁴Mammal Research Institute, Department of Zoology and Entomology, University of Pretoria, South Africa. ²⁵Dept. Fish, Wildlife and Conservation Biology, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80525, USA. ²⁶Université de Toulouse, INRAE, CEFS, F-31326 Castanet-Tolosan, France. ²⁷LTSEZ ZA PYRÉNÉES GARONNE, F-31320 Auzerville-Tolosane, France. ²⁸Department of Biology and Environment, Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Grand Portage, MN 55605, USA. ²⁹Parks Canada Agency, Box 220, Radium Hot Springs, BC, V0A 1M0, Canada. ³⁰Faculty of Biology, University of Belgrade, Studentski trg 16, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia. ³¹KuzeyDoğu Society, Ortakapı Mah. Şehit Yusuf Kad. 69, 36100 Lars, Turkey. ³²U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Elk Refuge, PO Box 510, Jackson, WY 83001, USA. ³³Missouri Department of Conservation, Columbia, MO, 65201, USA. ³⁴Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Jackson, WY 83001, USA. ³⁵Department of Migration, Max Planck Institute of Animal Behavior, 78315 Radolfzell, Germany. ³⁶Department of Biology, University of Konstanz, 78464 Konstanz, Germany. ³⁷Department of Civil, Environmental and Geodetic Engineering, The Ohio State University, 43210 Columbus, OH, USA. ³⁸Utah Division of Wildlife Resources. ³⁹Senckenberg Biodiversity and Climate Research Centre, Senckenberganlage 25, 60325 Frankfurt am Main, Germany. ⁴⁰White Buffalo Inc., 26 Davison Road, Moodus, CT 06469, USA. ⁴¹Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS), Murrayfield, Edinburgh, UK. ⁴²Instituto de Pesquisas Ecológicas (IPÊ), Nazaré Paulista, São Paulo, Brazil. ⁴³Save the Elephants, Marula Manor, Marula Lane, Karen, Nairobi 00200, Kenya. ⁴⁴Department of Zoology, Oxford University, Oxford OX1 3PS, UK. ⁴⁵Department of Forest and Wildlife Ecology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI 53706, USA. ⁴⁶Wildlife Ecology and Conservation Group, Wageningen University and Research, Droevendaalsesteeg 3a, 6708 PB, Wageningen, Netherlands. ⁴⁷Department of Forest and Wildlife Ecology, University of Wisconsin, 1630 Linden Drive, Madison, WI 53706, USA. ⁴⁸Global Wildlife Conservation Center, State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, 1 Forestry Drive, Syracuse, NY 13210, USA. ⁴⁹Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, 1500 Remount Rd, Front Royal, VA, USA. ⁵⁰Wildlife and Fish Division, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Government of the Northwest Territories, P.O. Box 1320, Yellowknife, NT, Canada. ⁵¹Alaska Department of Fish and Game, 43961 Kalifornsky Beach Road, Suite B, Soldotna, AK 99669, USA. ⁵²State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Syracuse, NY 13210, USA. ⁵³Department of Biology, College of Arts and Sciences, University of Dayton, Dayton, OH 45469, USA. ⁵⁴Parc National des Pyrénées, 65000 Tarbes, France. ⁵⁵Department of Evolutionary Biology and Environmental Studies, University of Zurich, Winterthurerstrasse 190, 8057 Zurich, Switzerland. ⁵⁶Yellowstone Center for Resources, P.O. Box 168, Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190, USA. ⁵⁷Department of Zoology and Physiology, University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY 82071, USA. ⁵⁸Biodiversity Research Centre, Namibia University of Science and Technology Pvt Ltd 13388 Windhoek, Namibia. ⁵⁹Wildlife Biology Program, Franke College of Forestry and Conservation, University of Montana, Missoula, MT, 59801, USA. ⁶⁰Norwegian Institute for Nature Research, Terrestrial Ecology Department, P.O. Box 5685 Torgarden, 7485 Trondheim, Norway. ⁶¹Behavioural Ecology, Department of Biology, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Großhaderner Str. 2, 82152 Planegg-Martinsried, Germany. ⁶²Department of Visitor Management and National Park Monitoring, Bavarian Forest National Park, Freyungstr. 2, 94481 Grafenau, Germany. ⁶³Chair of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation Biology, Faculty of Environment and Natural Resources, University of Freiburg, Tennenbacher Straße 4, 79106 Freiburg, Germany. ⁶⁴Institute for forest and wildlife management, Faculty of Applied Ecology, Agricultural Sciences and Biotechnology, Campus Evenstad, Inland Norway University of Applied Science, NO-2480 Koppang, Norway. ⁶⁵Wildlife and Fish Division, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Government of the Northwest Territories, P.O. Box 1320, Yellowknife, NT X1A 2Y9, Canada. ⁶⁶Ecological Program,

Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, Fort Indiantown Gap National Guard Training Center, Annville, PA 17003, USA. ⁶⁷Institute of Biodiversity, Animal Health and Comparative Medicine, University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QQ, UK. ⁶⁸Veterinary Biology Department, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Zagreb, Heinzelova 55, HR-10000 Zagreb, Croatia. ⁶⁹City of New York Parks and Recreation, Wildlife Unit, 1234 5th Avenue, 5th Floor, NY 10029, USA. ⁷⁰Faculty of Forestry and Wood Sciences, Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, Czech Republic. ⁷¹Grimso Wildlife Research Station, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, 739 93 Riddarhyttan, Sweden. ⁷²Snow Leopard Trust, 4649 Sunnyside Avenue North, Seattle, WA 98103, USA. ⁷³Centre for Ecosystem Science, School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW, 2052, Australia. ⁷⁴Taronga Institute of Science and Learning, Taronga Conservation Society, Sydney, NSW, 2088, Australia. ⁷⁵Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, Department of Forestry and Wildlife Management, Norway. ⁷⁶University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna, Research Institute of Wildlife Ecology, Austria. ⁷⁷Wildlife Department, Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Private Bag-10400, Nanyuki, Kenya. ⁷⁸U.S. Geological Survey, Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, Department of Zoology and Physiology, University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY 82071, USA. ⁷⁹North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, Raleigh, NC 27601, USA. ⁸⁰Department of Forestry and Environmental Resources, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC, 27695, USA. ⁸¹Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Government of the Northwest Territories, P.O. Box 2668, Yellowknife, NT X1A 2P9, Canada. ⁸²Norwegian Institute for Nature Research, NO-7484 Trondheim, Norway. ⁸³Department of Wildlife, Fish and Environmental studies, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, SE- 901 83 Umeå, Sweden. ⁸⁴Department of Forestry, Biotechnical Faculty, University of Ljubljana, Jamnikarjeva 101, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia. ⁸⁵Department of Evolutionary Ecology, Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research, Alfred- Kowalke- Str. 17, 10315 Berlin, Germany. ⁸⁶Biological Sciences Centre, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta T6G 2E9, Canada. ⁸⁷Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources, Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, Department of Zoology and Physiology, University of Wyoming, 804 East Fremont, Laramie, WY 82072, USA. ⁸⁸Büro für Wildökologie und Forstwirtschaft, Klagenfurt, Austria. ⁸⁹Clinic for birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish, Justus-Liebig-University Giessen, Germany. ⁹⁰Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, Department of Forestry and Wildlife Management, Anne Evenstads vei 80, 2480 Koppang, Norway. ⁹¹Snow Leopard Conservation Foundation, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. ⁹²Department of Fish and Wildlife Sciences, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID 83844, USA. ⁹³Biodiversity Research Institute (CSIC - Oviedo University - Principality of Asturias), Oviedo University, E-33600 Mieres, Spain. ⁹⁴Technical University of Munich, TUM School of Life Sciences, Ecosystem Dynamics and Forest Management Group, 85354 Freising, Germany. ⁹⁵Berchtesgaden National Park, 83471 Berchtesgaden, Germany. ⁹⁶Office Français de la Biodiversité, Direction de la Recherche et de l'Expertise, Unité Ongulés Sauvages, Juvignac, France. ⁹⁷Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, Department of Zoology and Physiology, University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY 82071, USA. ⁹⁸Faro Moro Eco Research, Estancia Faro Moro, Departamento de Boquerón,

Paraguay. ⁹⁹Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Wildlife Research and Monitoring Section, Trent University, 2140 East Bank Drive, Peterborough, Ontario, K9J 7B8, Canada. ¹⁰⁰Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Government of the Northwest Territories, Highway 5, PO Box 900, Fort Smith, Northwest Territories, X0E 0P0, Canada. ¹⁰¹Department of Forestry and Forestry resources, Norwegian Institute of Bioeconomy Research, Tingvoll gard, NO-6630 Tingvoll, Norway. ¹⁰²Department of Biological Sciences, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta T6G 2E9, Canada. ¹⁰³Centre for Ecological and Evolutionary Synthesis (CEES), Department of Biosciences, University of Oslo, P.O. Box 1066 Blindern, NO-0316 Oslo, Norway. ¹⁰⁴Department of Biology, University of British Columbia Okanagan, Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada. ¹⁰⁵Save Giraffe Now, 8333 Douglas Avenue, Suite 300, Dallas, Texas 75225, USA. ¹⁰⁶The Faculty of Biological Sciences, Goethe University, Max-von-Laue-Str. 9, 60438 Frankfurt am Main, Germany. ¹⁰⁷National Geographic Partners, 1145 17th Street NW, Washington, DC 20036, USA. ¹⁰⁸Wildlife Conservation Society, Mongolia Program, Post 20A, Box 21, Ulaanbaatar 14200, Mongolia. ¹⁰⁹Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, Department of Zoology and Physiology, University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY 82071, USA. ¹¹⁰Program in Ecology, University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY 82071, USA. ¹¹¹Centre for Biological Diversity, School of Biology, University of St. Andrews, Sir Harold Mitchell Building, St. Andrews, KY16 9TH, UK. ¹¹²Department of Environmental and Life Sciences, Trent University, 2140 East Bank Drive, Peterborough, Ontario K9J 7B8, Canada. ¹¹³Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Wildlife Research and Monitoring Section, Trent University, 2140 East Bank Drive, Peterborough, Ontario K9J 7B8, Canada. ¹¹⁴Centro Nacional de Pesquisa e Conservação de Mamíferos Carnívoros, Instituto Chico Mendes de Conservação da Biodiversidade, Atibaia, SP, 12952011 Brazil. ¹¹⁵Research Institute of Wildlife Ecology, University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna, Austria. ¹¹⁶Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Wildlife Management, Bavarian State Institute for Forestry, Hans-Carl-von Carlowitz Platz 1, 85354 Freising, Germany. ¹¹⁷School of Natural Sciences, Faculty of Science and Engineering, Macquarie University, NSW, 2109, Australia. ¹¹⁸Faculty of Environmental Protection, Trg mladosti 7, 3320 Velenje, Slovenia. ¹¹⁹Slovenian Forestry Institute, Večna pot 2, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia. ¹²⁰Department of Biodiversity, Faculty of Mathematics, Natural Sciences and Information Technologies, University of Primorska, Glagoljaška 8, 6000 Koper, Slovenia. ¹²¹Aurora Wildlife Research, 1918 Shannon Point Rd., Nelson, BC, V1L 6K1, Canada. ¹²²Department of Biology, Biotechnical Faculty, University of Ljubljana, Jamnikarjeva 101, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia. ¹²³Department of Zoology and Physiology, University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY 82071, USA. ¹²⁴Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ 08544, USA. ¹²⁵Department of Animal Sciences, Wageningen University and Research, De Elst 1, 6708 WD, Wageningen, Netherlands. ¹²⁶Department of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology, Harvard University, 26 Oxford Street, Cambridge MA 02138, USA. ¹²⁷Oikon Ltd, Institute of Applied Ecology, Trg Senjskih uskoka 1-2, HR-10020 Zagreb, Croatia. ¹²⁸Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK), Nur-Sultan, 010000, Kazakhstan. ¹²⁹Nordens Ark, 456 93 Hunnebostrand, Sweden. ¹³⁰Koç University Department of Molecular Biology and Genetics, Faculty of Sciences, Rumelifeneri, Istanbul, Sarıyer, Turkey. ¹³¹Institute of Nature

Conservation Polish Academy of Sciences, Adama Mickiewicza 33, 31-120 Kraków, Poland. ¹³²Departamento de Ciencias Integradas, Facultad de Ciencias Experimentales, Centro de Estudios Avanzados en Física, Matemáticas y Computación, Universidad de Huelva, 21071 Huelva, Spain. ¹³³Dimension Research, Ecology and Environment (D.R.E.Am. Italia), Via Garibaldi, 3, 52015 Pratovecchio Stia (AR), Italy. ¹³⁴Snow Leopard Trust, Seattle, WA 98103, USA. ¹³⁵Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Program, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. ¹³⁶Snow Leopard Foundation, Kyrgyzstan Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. ¹³⁷Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysore 570002, India. ¹³⁸Wildlife Sciences, Faculty of Forest Sciences and Forest Ecology, University of Goettingen, Göttingen, Germany. ¹³⁹CIBIO, Centro de Investigação em Biodiversidade e Recursos Genéticos, InBIO Laboratório Associado, Campus de Vairão, Universidade do Porto, 4485-661 Vairão, Portugal. ¹⁴⁰BIOPOLIS Program in Genomics, Biodiversity and Land Planning, CIBIO, Campus de Vairão, 4485-661 Vairão, Portugal. ¹⁴¹City of New York Parks and Recreation, Wildlife Unit, 1234 5th Avenue, 5th Floor, NY, NY 10029, USA. ¹⁴²Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Yale University, New Haven, CT, USA. ¹⁴³Center for Biodiversity and Global Change, Yale University, New Haven, CT, USA. ¹⁴⁴Max Planck - Yale Center for Biodiversity Movement and Global Change, Yale University. ¹⁴⁵School of Zoology, Faculty of Life Sciences, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv 69978, Israel. ¹⁴⁶San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance, 15600 San Pasqual Valley Road, Escondido, CA 92027, USA. ¹⁴⁷Grand Teton National Park, PO Drawer 170, Moose, Wyoming 83012, USA. ¹⁴⁸Wyoming Game and Fish Department, 700 Valley View Dr. Sheridan, WY 82801, USA. ¹⁴⁹Aarhus University, Department of Ecoscience - Wildlife Ecology, C.F. Møllers Allé 4-8, 8000 Aarhus C, Denmark. ¹⁵⁰Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Kodiak, AK 99615, USA. ¹⁵¹Welgevonden Game Reserve, P.O. Box 433, Vaalwater, South Africa. ¹⁵²Guyra Paraguay - CONACYT, Asunción, Paraguay. ¹⁵³Instituto Saite, Asunción, Paraguay. ¹⁵⁴Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, Windhoek, Namibia. ¹⁵⁵Ecology, Evolution and Environmental Biology, Columbia University, NY, NY 10027, USA. ¹⁵⁶School of Natural Resources, University of Arizona, 1064 E Lowell St, Tucson, AZ 85719, USA. ¹⁵⁷Park Canada, Banff National Park Resource Conservation, PO Box 900, Banff, Alberta T1L 1K2, Canada. ¹⁵⁸Centre for the Advanced Study of Collective Behaviour, University of Konstanz, 78457 Konstanz, Germany. ¹⁵⁹Center for Integrated Spatial Research, Environmental Studies Department, University of California, Santa Cruz, CA 95064, USA. ¹⁶⁰Department of Fish, Wildlife and Conservation Biology, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523, USA. ¹⁶¹USDA National Wildlife Research Center, Predator Research Facility, Millville, UT 84326, USA. ¹⁶²Department of Wildland Resources, Utah State University, Logan, UT 84322, USA. ¹⁶³Tatra National Park, Kuźnice 1, 34-500, Zakopane, Poland. ¹⁶⁴Department of Biological Sciences, Goethe University, Max-von-Laue-Strasse 9, 60438 Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

science.org/doi/10.1126/science.abo6499

Materials and Methods

Fig. S1

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References (36–59)

MDAR Reproducibility Checklist

Submitted 23 February 2022; accepted 27 April 2023
10.1126/science.abo6499

Behavioral responses of terrestrial mammals to COVID-19 lockdowns

Marlee A. Tucker, Aafke M. Schipper, Tempe S. F. Adams, Nina Attias, Tal Avgar, Natarsha L. Babic, Kristin J. Barker, Guillaume Bastille-Rousseau, Dominik M. Behr, Jerrold L. Belant, Dean E. Beyer, Jr., Niels Blaum, J. David Blount, Dirk Bockmühl, Ricardo Luiz Pires Boulhosa, Michael B. Brown, Bayarbaatar Buuveibaatar, Francesca Cagnacci, Justin M. Calabrese, Rok Černe, Simon Chamailé-Jammes, Aung Nyein Chan, Michael J. Chase, Yannick Chaval, Yvette Chenaux-Ibrahim, Seth G. Cherry, Duško Čirović, Emrah Çoban, Eric K. Cole, Laura Conlee, Alyson Courtemanch, Gabriele Cozzi, Sarah C. Davidson, Darren DeBloois, Nandintsetseg Dejid, Vickie DeNicola, Arnaud L. J. Desbiez, Iain Douglas-Hamilton, David Drake, Michael Egan, Jasper A.J. Eikelboom, William F. Fagan, Morgan J. Farmer, Julian Fennessy, Shannon P. Finnegan, Christen H. Fleming, Bonnie Fournier, Nicholas L. Fowler, Mariela G. Gantchoff, Alexandre Garnier, Benedikt Gehr, Chris Geremia, Jacob R. Goheen, Morgan L. Hauptfleisch, Mark Hebblewhite, Morten Heim, Anne G. Hertel, Marco Heurich, A. J. Mark Hewison, James Hodson, Nicholas Hoffman, J. Grant C. Hopcraft, Djuro Huber, Edmund J. Isaac, Karolina Janik, Miloš Ježek, Örjan Johansson, Neil R. Jordan, Petra Kaczensky, Douglas N. Kamaru, Matthew J. Kauffman, Todd M. Kautz, Roland Kays, Allicia P. Kelly, Jonas Kindberg, Miha Krofel, Josip Kusak, Clayton T. Lamb, Tayler N. LaSharr, Peter Leimgruber, Horst Leitner, Michael Lierz, John D.C. Linnell, Purejav Lkhagvaja, Ryan A. Long, José Vicente López-Bao, Matthias-Claudio Loretto, Pascal Marchand, Hans Martin, Lindsay A. Martinez, Roy T. McBride, Jr., Ashley A.D. McLaren, Erling Meisingset, Joerg Melzheimer, Evelyn H. Merrill, Arthur D. Middleton, Kevin L. Monteith, Seth A. Moore, Bram Van Moorter, Nicolas Morellet, Thomas Morrison, Rebekka Müller, Atle Mysterud, Michael J. Noonan, David O'Connor, Daniel Olson, Kirk A. Olson, Anna C. Ortega, Federico Ossi, Manuela Panzacchi, Robert Patchett, Brent R. Patterson, Rogerio Cunha de Paula, John Payne, Wibke Peters, Tyler R. Petroelje, Benjamin J. Pitcher, Boštjan Pokorny, Kim Poole, Hubert Potočnik, Marie-Pier Poulin, Robert M. Pringle, Herbert H.T. Prins, Nathan Ranc, Slaven Reljić, Benjamin Robb, Ralf Röder, Christer M. Rolandsen, Christian Rutz, Albert R. Salemgareyev, Gustaf Samelius, Heather Sayine-Crawford, Sarah Schooler, Çahan H. Şekercioğlu, Nuria Selva, Paola Semenzato, Agnieszka Sergiel, Koustubh Sharma, Avery L. Shawler, Johannes Signer, Václav Silovský, João Paulo Silva, Richard Simon, Rachel A. Smiley, Douglas W. Smith, Erling J. Solberg, Diego Ellis-Soto, Orr Spiegel, Jared Stabach, Jenna Stacy-Dawes, Daniel R. Stahler, John Stephenson, Cheyenne Stewart, Olav Strand, Peter Sunde, Nathan J. Svoboda, Jonathan Swart, Jeffrey J. Thompson, Katrina L. Toal, Kenneth Uiseb, Meredith C. VanAcker, Marianela Velilla, Tana L. Verzuh, Bettina Wachter, Brittany L. Wagler, Jesse Whittington, Martin Wikelski, Christopher C. Wilmers, George Wittemyer, Julie K. Young, Filip Zioba, Tomasz Zwijacz-Kozica, Mark A. J. Huijbregts, and Thomas Mueller

Science **380** (6649), . DOI: 10.1126/science.abo6499

Editor's summary

Policies to reduce human movement during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic produced a kind of natural experiment to observe how human activities affect animal behavior. Using GPS tracking data from 2300 individual mammals of 43 species, Tucker *et al.* documented changes in mammal movement patterns during the spring of 2020 compared with the previous year (see the Perspective by St. Clair and Raymond). In locations with strict lockdown policies, animals traveled longer distances during the lockdown period. In highly populated areas, mammals moved less frequently and were closer to roads than they were before the pandemic. These results demonstrate how human activities constrain animal movement and what happens when those activities cease. —Bianca Lopez

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