



Amphibian Voice

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Your Issue of Amphibian Voice

What Kids for Turtles Is To Me

By: Grace Pigeau (Age 10)

A lot of people think that turtles are slimy, gross, disgusting and useless. Well, I disagree. I think that turtles are an important part of natural life and are cute. What Kids For Turtles is trying to do is convince people turtles are important and to do this they're putting up turtle crossing signs and going to events and answering questions. They also go to schools and give presentations. One of the things that surprised me most was that girls and women volunteer more than men. The best thing about Kids For Turtles is while you get to handle lots of animals you're helping to save a species. The worst part about Kids For Turtles is when it's chilly out, we're outside. You get pretty cold.

Bob Bowles is our "manager". The reason I started going to Kids For Turtles is that my mom became a member and was always helping out. Most of the time I would too. There is also another group called Sciensational Snakes and it's really cool too. We are not just trying to help turtles. We also work with frogs, salamanders and sometimes snakes. I like it because the kids always participate in things like catching (and releasing) frogs and going in marshes and ponds. But not just kids are encouraged to go there, also adults. I find that we mostly don't work with sea turtles. We're helping the world one "shell" at a time.

I think that it is a great learning experience and exciting at the same time. Kids for Turtles rules!



Grace Pigeau (right) and her friend Jayden Walker (left) taking time out to look for frogs at a recent Kids For Turtles Environmental Education workshop.

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Editor's Note: The 2007 Fall issue of *Amphibian Voice* is entitled *Your Issue of Amphibian Voice* because it is full of submissions from your year spent in wetlands. Pictures have come in from all over Ontario and the stories in this issue range from humorous to motivating. What's common between them all is your love for wetland communities and your strong desire to protect them.

Long Point Causeway

By: Don Scallen

The tiny Blanding's turtle scrambled over the asphalt, intent on reaching the other side of the busy road. When I first saw the little creature I was about 50 meters away. With cars rapidly approaching adrenaline surged through my body. At my age I seldom run anymore, but I did on that day, sprinting as quickly as I could on my 49 year old legs. Even at that I realized there was no way I could beat the next car to the turtle. As I ran the Blanding's moved further out onto the road, heading for a disastrous rendezvous with the vehicle bearing down on it. My heart was in my mouth.

The wheels of the car passed within centimeters of the turtle which responded by withdrawing into its shell. Now immobile on the pavement, it was even more vulnerable than it had been before. I arrived just before a second vehicle passed by and snatched the turtle to safety. This turtle would now have the chance to add more years to its life. With fervent hopes for its future safety I released it in the marsh on the side of the road it was originally intent on reaching.

This incident brightened the gloom I had experienced on this sunny July day at Long Point. I had walked the length of the causeway, first on one side of the road and then the other. My objective was to learn more about this infamous stretch of road. I discovered the remains of about 20 turtles on my walk. Most were painted turtles but there were also a few snapping turtles and two map turtles. Blanding's turtles were not among the

dead, though the little one I rescued certainly would have been had I not been there.

The Long Point causeway splits a rich marsh ecosystem in half and thousands of animals are killed along this stretch of road annually. The majority are amphibians and the majority of those are leopard frogs, but hundreds of reptiles also meet their demise here each year. Many of these are species at risk. Populations can not sustain this threat. The Long Point causeway serves as a prominent example of the terrible toll roads and highways exact on our reptiles and amphibians.

Finally people are coming together. Well attended public meetings conducted by the Long Point Causeway Improvement Project Committee (LPCIPC) have brought the issue much attention. Comprised of representatives from government, the community and several conservation organizations the LPCIPC is good news. One of its member groups, the Long Point Biosphere Reserve Foundation has awarded funds to a consulting firm to explore, in part, possible improvements. To protect wildlife most effectively these improvements will need to include a major restructuring of the causeway. Such costly measures will take time to become reality but it is obviously important to get the ball rolling.

The Blanding's turtle I picked up was one of the few lucky ones. For every reptile or amphibian that is rescued hundreds likely die. My hope is that future generations of these creatures will be able to move from one side of the marsh to the other without the risk of dying.



Blanding's turtle © Don Scallen

Changes in Amphibians at Oshawa Second Marsh

By: James Kamstra



Leopard frog © James Kamstra

Oshawa Second Marsh is, or at least was, a large coastal wetland at the mouth of Lake Ontario, just east of Oshawa. For the past 15 years I have been monitoring amphibians there annually. Over the period of monitoring, some interesting changes have taken place, both in the marsh, and to the amphibians there.

Before 2002, Farewell Creek flowed into Second Marsh and out to the lake through an opening in the barrier beach. With the combination of sedimentation from its urbanizing watershed, and huge numbers of thrashing carp coming in from the lake, the waters were constantly turbid allowing for only sparse cover of submerged aquatic plants. The central part of the marsh was a shallow open basin and the rim of emergent cattail was declining rapidly. Very few amphibians were breeding in the main marsh. Virtually all were in surrounding pond areas.

Since conditions in Second Marsh were not improving, The Friends of Second Marsh, (a non-governmental organization concerned about the marsh's well being) secured the help of Ducks Unlimited to intervene. Over the winter of 2002, a great earthen dike was constructed that effectively diverted Farewell Creek around Second Marsh, directly to Lake Ontario. In addition the barrier beach was closed off so that the marsh was no longer connected to the lake. The sedimentation now bypassed the marsh, and the carp could no longer get in. Furthermore the water levels in the marsh could be controlled to maintain and improve the interspersed between open marsh and wetland.

Since then the area of emergent vegetation has increased. With improved water clarity, submerged aquatic vegetation have also proliferated in the open water areas. These changes have greatly improved conditions for amphibians. Monitoring in 2007 showed the highest numbers of green and northern leopard frogs within the main marsh during the 15 year period. In addition, tadpoles of green and leopard frogs are now regularly encountered at several locations within the marsh.

The summer of 2007 came and went with very little precipitation. Consequently most of the surrounding wetlands dried up sooner than they do in normal years. Unfortunately most of the temporary woodland pools, which are used by breeding wood frogs, dried out before the tadpoles could transform. One adjacent pond known as Scattergood's Pond, which had always held water permanently, dried up completely in 2007. Prior to 2001 Scattergoods was probably the most productive breeding site in the Second Marsh study area but it has gradually become shallower and the densities of amphibian larvae have declined. Green frogs, which spend a whole year in the tadpole stage, were unable to successfully breed in Scattergood's Pond this year, perhaps for the first time in decades.



Scattergood's Pond August 2007 © James Kamstra

Long term monitoring has shown how dynamic and variable amphibian breeding can be. It is interesting to note that a decade ago, nearly all successful amphibian breeding occurred in the wetlands surrounding the main marsh, and in 2007 took place in the marsh itself. The study underlies the importance of having a number of breeding sites to maintain populations.

Islands of Turtles

By: Matt Ellerbeck



Blanding's turtle © Matt Ellerbeck

Editor's note: Location names withheld to protect turtle nesting sites

Turtles of all kinds have long fascinated me. During the warmer months of the year, I always go out to see if I can observe these interesting creatures. When I heard that the provincially threatened Blanding's Turtle may be present on X Island I was more than intrigued, especially when X Island is only about 20 minutes from my home. In spring I set off to the island for my first Turtle Tally trip. I searched diligently through the marshy areas where I suspected the turtles might be. However I didn't find any Blanding's Turtles. The marsh was very dense, and turtles can be elusive. A few more trips were taken and the Blanding's Turtle again failed to appear. I then decided to wait until the nesting season, when the turtles leave the security of their watery homes to start the perilous journey over land. During the season I headed to a spot on the Island where locals had told me they had observed turtles. As I walked down a long stretch of beach I saw something up ahead. I quickly ran towards it. Sure enough it was a Blanding's turtle. The turtle was traveling towards the water, she must have just laid her eggs. I observed her as she slowly crawled into the waves. Within minutes another turtle came trampling down the sandbar towards the water. I was overly excited! I had now confirmed that there are indeed Blanding's turtles on the island. I sent my observations to both the Ontario Turtle Tally and Turtle Watch. I

was informed by Turtle Watch, that the observation was the first ever for a Blanding's Turtle on X Island! I was elated to help them get a record of a previously undocumented population. The next night, I headed back to the island to see if I could observe anymore turtles. The turtles did not disappoint as four more were spotted along the beach. The next night, I saw three more turtles on the beach, and three emerging from a nearby pond, for a total of 12 Blanding's Turtles observed.

X Island turned out not to be the only 'Turtle Island' in the area. Y Island turned out to have a population of Map Turtles. Map Turtles are federally listed as a Species at Risk under the designation Special Concern. During two trips to Y Island I spotted over 30 Map Turtles. The turtles were seen basking off the shore of the Island on some large rocks. With the continual threat of habitat loss, habitat alteration, and road mortality, turtles have many factors contributing to their demise. It is however a beacon of hope to see so many turtles, especially ones listed at risk, still thriving and surviving. My trips to these 'turtle islands' has given me an optimistic hope that with help these armored reptiles may continue to soldier on!

Urban Turtle Initiative Announcement, Clementine's eggs hatched!

The Toronto Zoo's Urban Turtle Initiative is very pleased to announce that the one documented clutch of eggs laid this summer by our Blanding's turtle, Clementine, has successfully hatched. Upon excavation of the nest, we found that 100% of the eggs hatched, and 100% of the hatchlings emerged. We are so delighted to know that there is new recruitment into this population. Although the news of hatchlings is very exciting, the fate of the population is dependent upon protecting our reproductive adults. Urban turtles face environmental challenges such as pollution and the loss of suitable habitat. Conservation and management efforts are paramount at this time to assist in the recovery of Toronto's urban turtle populations. It is our responsibility to ensure that these hatchlings have a safe environment in which to grow and develop so that one day they may contribute to future generations.

Your Pictures...



American toad, Pointe au Baril
© Fiona Charles



Stinkpot turtle shell, Kennebec Lake
© Noreen Derfingier



Turtle Rescuer, Orillia
© Kids for Turtles



Painted turtle, Grimsby
© Heather Fox



Snapping turtle hatchlings
Toronto © Dave Watkins



Macregor Bay © Sue Nyhof



Green frog, Innisfil
© Jennifer Howard



Snapping turtle eggs,
Waubashene © Chris Aplin



Grey treefrog © Betty Terry



Painted turtle, Trenton
© Barbara Pratt



© Sue Nyhof



Painted turtle, Toronto
© Dave Watkins

Have Land, will Pond

By: John O'Connor

My wife and I used to live in Ontario - Hamilton and then Kitchener. We moved to Nova Scotia a few years ago where we have retired by the sea. No matter where we have gone we have always enjoyed a pond. In fact, our motto might be "Have land, will pond."

I remember my first pond in Hamilton. I didn't want to have a liner so I had looked at the options and discovered "bentonite", a volcanic clay. However, it seemed that you couldn't get it in Canada. (Editor's note: bentonite is now available in Canada). So when my wife and my daughter drove down to visit family in Florida I came along and stopped in at a big wholesale plant in Georgia. I loaded ten heavy bags of the stuff into the van. My daughter and wife had a good laugh telling everyone what I had done. And, well, to make a long story mercifully short, it didn't hold water and yes, they are still laughing.

Our pond in Kitchener had a liner as there was no way I was going back to Georgia. It was about 10'x15' and took forever to dig. Actually, it also took a lot of food and beer as some of my young friends did most of the work after I got tired in the first hour. In a year or so it looked pretty natural as I had put the geotextile liner on both sides of the rubber and plants filled in quickly.



Kitchener pond © John O'Connor

Our back yard in Nova Scotia had an underground spring coming from under the house and the backyard was a muddy marsh. The soil is clay and the locals suggested that if I dug a hole it will fill up. They were right. I got a young man with a huge back hoe and he had the pond dug and the dirt smoothed and the rocks lined up and the small stones spread in no time. I was really worried that he was going to take the porch down, but it all went smooth. We have really enjoyed the pond in the year we have had it. The vegetation is filled in from both natural stuff and the store bought. In fact we didn't even have to argue over the colour of the lilies as we have two.



Pond construction © John O'Connor

Now I am volunteering as a teacher at St. Joseph Mercy School of Nursing in Guyana till mid-December. We have a pond here too, and I've been monitoring the daily amphibian visitors. It doesn't have any permanent residents yet, as it still needs more vegetation to grow in before it becomes somewhere that a respectable frog would want to call it home. Till then, our dozens of dragon flies and some small native fish keep the mosquito population down.

2008 is the Year of the Frog at the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and Canadian Association of Zoos and Aquariums (CAZA)

Look out for amphibian related events at all AZA and CAZA member zoos and aquariums, including Frogzibitz at the Toronto Zoo March

7th – 16th. For more information go to www.torontozoo.com

Was that a turtle?

By: Jennifer Howard



Snapping turtle © Jennifer Howard

This summer my son Jeff (15) and I were very busy monitoring an osprey nest and working on a stream restoration project. And while going to and from the wetlands I spent more time putting on the brakes and doing u turns than ever before. Driving along and spotting something ...

"Jeff did you see that? Was that a turtle?"

"I think so," was the reply.

To tell you the truth there were a couple of times when it was not a turtle, but a very good replica made out of someone's hat or glove. Yep, the old hat & glove turtle trick. Well for us naturalists that is a bit embarrassing. Like pulling over a whole group of birders and saying there's a great horned owl. Only to find out it's, yes, plastic. OOPSS!!

But most often it was a real turtle. So I spent a lot of time doing the turn around to get out of the car and help them across the road. Of course I was always careful to take the turtle in the same direction it was heading so the turtle wouldn't just turn around and go again. And as always I was careful to never put myself at risk. Of course photos are a must too. I am a naturalist/photographer and the opportunity to get up close and personal with a turtle is hard to refuse. One day I had multiple chances to snap pictures as I had to turn around three times in 10 min. We had no sooner helped one Midland painted turtle across the road and were just pulling out when another one behind us started to cross. By the time this second

painted was across we spotted a snapper enjoying sunning herself with her eyes closed right in the middle of the lane. The heat of the road must have felt good. As I approached her she looked like she was asleep. I grabbed a couple photos and as I saw traffic coming I took the chance she would not bite or scratch me. Luckily she was as mellow as they come. This was in front of Big Bay Point Marina, which is slated to be a major resort development.

Then there was the time my sister Vicki was driving and we were headed to a field trip outing with our club (six mile lake conservationists club). Vicki & I both at the same time said ...

"Was that a turtle?"

We were a bit late but so was the president of the club, my other sister Anne, who saw us and pulled over. This one turned out to be a Blanding's turtle. Awesome.



Blanding's turtle © Jennifer Howard

It was so rewarding to know that at least these guys got away safe & sound. I think we helped about 5-6 turtles this summer. And well, look at that face. How could you not help a turtle?

And as we drove around these precious wetlands we realized the urgency for turtle crossing signs to be part of our road sign system. I have applied for these signs to be put up here in Innisfil, Kids for Turtles and Six Mile Lake Conservationist Club have gotten some put up as well. We all need to speak up and get the ball rolling to make people aware these little guys are out and about. I am still awaiting this to come up at council here, and although we have missed this year, hopefully we'll get them up for the next. **(Editor's note: AAP provides turtle crossing signs for some landowners)**

Bobbers: A Tribute

By: Mandy Karch



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Amphibian Voice is distributed to participants of the Adopt-A-Pond programme. The purpose of this newsletter is to provide information on amphibian, turtle and wetland conservation issues and efforts in Ontario.

Send in your stories, drawings and photographs to the address below and we will "hoppily" include them in future issues.

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On September 21, 2007, Bobbers, a male Blanding's turtle was found dead in his marsh. In 2005, the Urban Turtle Initiative started studying Blanding's turtles and Bobbers was the first turtle to be caught. He was the oldest mature male in the study and was often found in close proximity with our other turtles, Clementine, Brooke and the only other mature male in the study Lucky. In our opinion, Bobbers was the patriarch of the Blanding's population in the Rouge Park. He was a striking turtle, and although faded in colour compared to younger individuals, we loved him and were always thrilled to see him whether he was basking on a log or seen foraging among the lily-pads.

Bobbers was a part of our everyday routine. We followed his movements, and there was a certain comfort in knowing that we always knew where to find him. The last weeks of his life were spent basking on a large mud flat. Lucky was never very far away.

On the day we found Bobbers lying limp in the shallow water next to the mud flat we rushed him back to the zoo where the caring staff immediately responded. When he arrived he still had a weak heart beat. The skilled zoo veterinarians and keepers provided Bobbers with the best in medical attention. Their efforts and concern for our turtle assured us during this difficult time. Unfortunately, the attention was too late and Bobbers was unable to recover. His beating heart was just an innate response, and was not strong enough to give life.

In the days following his death, our hearts are heavy and we miss having Bobbers among our roster of turtles. Our tracking schedule has not changed, but our experience has. We miss Bobbers everyday and he will always be remembered as the veteran Blanding's turtle of the Urban Turtle Initiative.