

# Amphibian Voice

Vol.16 No.4

ISSN 1705-8228

Winter 2006

## Conservation Success Stories of 2006

### Saving the Frogs: My Summer Adventure

By: Victoria Wight (age 9)

At the end of the school year in June 2006, my dad and I were going for a bike ride past a frog pond. We saw that people were building model homes and that the pond would soon be filled in so that new houses could be built there.

The pond was so disgusting. There was lots of garbage, tin cans, bottles and plastic all over the place. I knew this was not a good spot for the frogs or toads to live. I felt very sad and mad knowing that the frogs, toads

and little baby tadpoles would not have a clean home to live in or even have a very good chance of living at all. I decided that it would be a great idea if we could try to catch all the

frogs in the pond and move them to another place where they would be safe for a long time.

My summer project to rescue the frogs began

on the Canada Day weekend. Every night over the summer holidays, my dad and I took our bug nets and containers to the pond hoping to catch a lot of frogs and toads. When we first started we caught more than 20 each night. As the summer went on, we got fewer and fewer frogs. I remember when we caught only one frog, but I didn't give up. I wanted to catch 400 frogs before school began in September. Once school started it

was harder to catch the frogs because the water level was down and it was getting cooler every night.

There aren't many amphibians left in the pond because we have rescued 505 frogs and toads all together. We moved them all to a new habitat at a storm water quality pond near the Harmony Creek Conservation Area in Oshawa, Ontario. I am so happy that the frogs can now be safe in their new home. I can hardly wait until next spring to start all over again.



#### *In this Issue*

|                            |     |
|----------------------------|-----|
| Saving Frogs .....         | 1   |
| Reptile Talk .....         | 2   |
| Urban Snapping turtles..   | 3   |
| Blanding's in Algonquin    | 4   |
| Turtling in the Kawartha's | 5   |
| COSEWIC News.....          | 6-7 |
| Ribbits Review .....       | 8   |



**EDITORS NOTE:** As our title suggests, the winter issue of *Amphibian Voice* is dedicated to successful and inspirational conservation stories from the 2006 season. The cover story (Victoria Wight) is an awesome account about one young girl's passion for frogs and toads. There are three stories that concern turtles, including: an update from Dave "The Turtle Guy" Watkins about turtle nesting in urban Toronto; research activities of Chris Edge, a graduate student from Laurentian University, on Blanding's turtle in Algonquin Park; and a summary from Jeff Park, Parks Canada, on a turtle outreach and stewardship campaign in the Kawartha Lakes. Steve Jones, from Toronto Zoo's Education Department, provides information about the Canadian Government "Species-At-Risk" Programme, and how species are ranked through the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. And finally, Jacey Moore writes (below) about her love for reptiles and her participation in an Adopt-A-Pond Turtle outreach event, in her home town Peterborough, with our Turtle Stewardship Coordinator Daniela Rambaldini. Students were encouraged and excited to see one of their peers sharing in the teaching responsibilities!

Hopefully our winter issue leaves you feeling encouraged for 2007 – enjoy! And happy holidays!

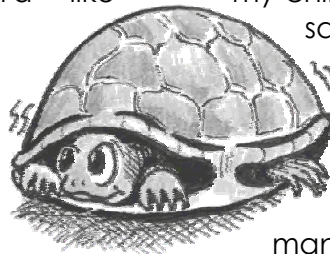
## Reptile Talk: Turtles Rock!

By: Jacey Moore (age 8)

When I was little, *really* little, I was really nice to animals, even spiders. When I got older (I'll be 9 soon) I liked them even more and became interested in all animals. My favorites are reptiles.

I think it's really important that people help solve problems for animals such as loss of habitat, pollution and getting hurt. People should know and understand how household litter affects wildlife. Litter is sometimes mistakenly eaten by





animals, and sometimes animals like turtles get stuck in milk rings or plastic 6-pack rings. And litter just doesn't look nice. To keep the environment safe for animals, we all need to become habitat stewards. Because of the many problems facing turtles, from litter to predators, many of Ontario's turtles are "At Risk". My goal is to help keep them off the extinct list. I'd like my children to grow up with the same species that I have enjoyed.



Turtles help out the environment so much. They eat bugs and many other plants and animals. They are the oldest animals in wetlands. Turtles are smart and have an excellent sense of smell. Turtles often lay in the sun in groups. I always wondered why until I found out they feed together, warn each other of predators, and thermoregulation. I think that is very smart.

It's not the best to keep reptiles as pets, but I can see why people want to because they are so cute. My mom wouldn't let me buy one, but I have been lucky enough to find one who needs a new home. My advice is to always know how to look after your pets so they don't get sick, and never release them into the wild if you get bored of them. There is always another way. You have to keep them fed with fresh food and water and keep their environment clean. Just think, would you like to eat old food and live in a messy house?

Special things I want you to know:

-  Never buy things made from turtles, this only helps to bring them closer to being endangered.
-  Never intentionally harm a turtle, they are our friends.
-  Learn more about all the animals that you live with, after all, we live WITH them.
-  Don't buy baby turtles and never let a pet loose in the wild.

Thanks for listening and caring about my friends, turtles rock!!!

If you'd like to talk turtle, please email me at [enviroturtlegirl@hotmail.com](mailto:enviroturtlegirl@hotmail.com)

# Eglinton Flats Turtle Survival

By: David "The Turtle Guy" Watkins

The summer has passed so quickly! It seems that not long ago I was watching turtles nesting around the park.



**Hatchling Snapping turtle**  
© AAP Staff

As I reported in my last article for *Amphibian Voice* (Summer 2006), we have been monitoring 17 turtle nests around a pond and the neighborhood ravines near Jane and Eglinton. Of these nests, we recorded 101 baby Snapping turtles and 1 Midland painted turtle which made it to the water.

Unfortunately, two hatchling turtles were stepped on as they emerged from their nest by unsuspecting nature goers.

Earlier in the spring I pulled several dead turtles from the pond (their deaths due to lowered water levels). I had been devastated by the loss. But, I have also been pleasantly surprised at the numbers that are left. Although the area has lost at least 15 turtles in the past two years, there still seems to be a healthy population.

Fortunately, members of the community and myself have communicated with the public about the wonderful wildlife that live at Eglinton Flats and how we cherish them all. This coming year we will be posting signs to warn park users to be careful as they enjoy this gem. There is a lot to do when it comes to educating the public

and others users of the Park. We must open our eyes and look around at what we have got and what we are destroying.

Next year I will move on to another pond I have located to the east of the Park. It was reported to have a good population of turtles. Even the red-eared slider - you know the one I mean, the pet store turtle. People just get tired of them and let them go into local wetlands and waterways. There are so many of them, and some have even learned how to hibernate. I have decided to build a pond in the back yard to house these creatures as they are caught. By the looks of things I will have quite a few!

As for the frogs and toads at Eglinton Flats, there is not many and this makes me wonder why. They are good indicators of pollution and their absence might indicate a problem in the Park. It could be from the runoff from the upper streets surrounding the Park. Thankfully, though, people are now using less fertilizers and pesticides and are becoming aware of the dangers they pose. It may take some time but I am sure we can bring the frogs and toads back.



**Hatchling Snapping turtles**  
© AAP Staff

**Way to go Dave!**

# Defining the Critical Habitat of the Threatened Blanding's Turtle in Algonquin Provincial Park

By: Christopher Edge, M.Sc. Candidate, and Dr. Jacqueline Litzgus, Assistant Professor, Laurentian University

One of the more charismatic species of turtle to inhabit Ontario's ponds and wetlands is the Blanding's turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*). This species is characterized by having a highly domed carapace (top shell), bright yellow chin, long neck and a devilish smile.

This threatened species has 20% of its global range contained within Ontario, placing the province with significant responsibility towards its conservation. However, in order for conservation efforts to be effective, the critical habitat that a species uses must first be defined.

For turtles at risk, critical habitat can be broken up into three major components; nest sites, summer wetlands and hibernacula. This research project, located in beautiful Algonquin Provincial Park, began in the spring of 2006. It is focused on defining the critical habitat requirements of the Blanding's turtle. The main goal is to develop a predictive model for habitat selection and to define the habitat requirements of the species.



Chris Edge and Dr. Jacqueline Litzgus.

In the spring, 11 turtles were outfitted with radio transmitters, 7 of which were followed throughout the activity season and are still currently being tracked. The first year of this two-year study

indicates that individuals select ponds and sphagnum marshes. Nest sites were located by patrolling roadways and fields, and these sites were added to Algonquin Parks' vast inventory of areas of concern for species at risk.



Blanding's turtle with radio-transmitter, Algonquin Park © Chris Edge

During the nesting season, females will travel great distances to find a suitable nest site. One female traveled a 12km round trip to nest, traveling one way in about five days. This species also travels considerable distances over land between wetlands during the activity season, with travels in excess of 600m between wetlands being quite common.

Hibernation sites were located by tracking turtles until they became largely inactive. Habitat variables were measured at these sites and throughout the wetlands. In addition to habitat variables, water temperatures are being monitored using miniature temperature data loggers which record temperatures every 180 minutes. By investigating hibernation sites, it can be determined if these sites are limiting the range of the species.

Next year, 20 individuals will be tracked, and habitat selection will be investigated on a much smaller scale. When this study is completed, a detailed description of what constitutes year round critical habitat of the Blanding's turtle will be completed. This definition will include all wetland and terrestrial habitat types that are used by the species throughout the activity period. It will also define any trends in habitat use, and show which habitat types need increased protection during different times of the year in order to ensure this charismatic species continues to exist in Canadian wetlands.

**Editors Note: Toronto Zoo is pleased to support Chris through the Toronto Zoo's Endangered Species Fund.**

# 'Turtling' on the Trent-Severn Waterway

By: Jeff Park

Turtle Species-At-Risk Summer Program Leader,  
Parks Canada

Parks Canada, Trent-Severn Waterway National Historic Site of Canada, with the assistance of funding provided by the Parks Canada Species at Risk Program, undertook a turtle species-at-risk program this past summer, along the Waterway. The programme was initiated in 2005, and continues with a combination of field inventory and public outreach activities.

The turtle species targeted in this programme include: *Emydoidea blandingii* (Blanding's turtle), *Graptemys geographica* (Northern map turtle), *Sternotherus odoratus* (Stinkpot), *Clemmys guttata* (Spotted turtle) and *Glyptemys insculpta* (Wood turtle). All of these species have been designated 'At Risk', to different degrees, by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC).

A crew of three summer students completed the presence/absence inventory within the central Kawartha Lakes portion of the Waterway using a combination of visual surveys by boat, live trapping efforts, and sighting reports made by the public while out enjoying the Waterway. By the end of the summer the team of students had covered a total surface area of approximately 272km<sup>2</sup> and 1266km of shoreline (including islands) in search of these elusive species!

## WE FOUND SOME !

Crew members documented a total of 13 new rare turtle sightings! We found 5 Blanding's turtle, 7 Northern map turtle and 1 Stinkpot. Sighting reports that were submitted by the public confirmed 18 historic SAR occurrences (17 Northern map turtle and 1 Blanding's turtle) that had been previously documented in the Natural Heritage Information Centre (NHIC, OMNR) database.

## HOW THE COMMUNITY HELPED

In order to get the public's help, our crew published pamphlets, posters, postcards, index cards, and six newspaper articles to raise awareness of the programme and to help people accurately identify the often elusive turtle Species-At-Risk. A turtle hotline was set up to allow people to call in and report any rare turtle species occurrences they may have had, ask questions regarding turtle biology/ecology, or inquiries about more information regarding the SAR turtle program. This hotline received 44 calls during the summer, 20 of which were to report a rare turtle species occurrence!

Ten public outreach events were scheduled during the months of June through to August. Five were held at Environment Canada Lock Stations and the other five events were held within the City of Peterborough. Our crew was able to engage over 850 members of the community while attending these events!



### Trent Severn Waterway Outreach Event 2006, Peterborough Festival of Lights

From left to right: Christina Rohe, Trent University student;  
Dave Ireland, AAP Coordinator; Meribeth Stott, Sir Sandford  
Fleming College student; and Jeff Parks, Parks Canada

With the Waterway becoming more popular for its recreational appeal, shorelines are experiencing increasing development pressure. A greater emphasis must be placed on the protection of the natural resources and species within the Waterway through public education, stricter policies, and a greater understanding of the aquatic ecosystem.

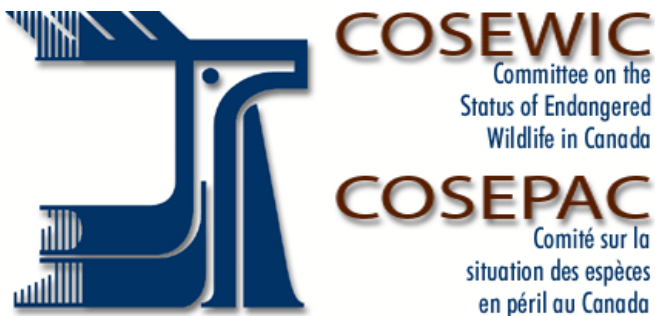
# Beyond the Status Report: What Changes Occur For a Species Listed As At Risk

By: Steve Jones

Toronto Zoo Education Coordinator

It has become apparent to many people that certain plant and animal species are occurring in lower numbers than they used to. It is obvious that if the factors that are responsible in reducing their populations are not reversed, these species may become extinct. There is no question that species need our help, so why is having them officially listed as a species at risk important?

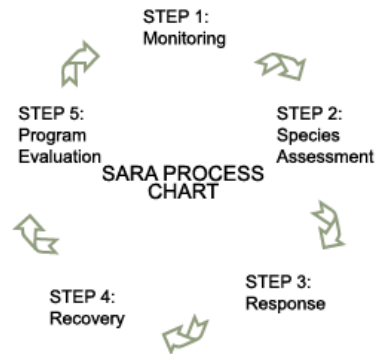
Having a species examined by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) offers many advantages. Firstly, a COSEWIC species report takes into account all of the information available, including on population size, threats, interactions with other species and population change over time. Secondly, the review process on a COSEWIC report is rigorous. Edits by experts from across Canada occur at both six months and two months before the report is due. Lastly, a consensus must be reached from all COSEWIC members as to what level of threat the species should be listed as.



The Species At Risk Act (SARA), established in 2003, ensures that any species that is listed by COSEWIC as threatened, endangered, or extirpated receives support for its survival as detailed in a recovery plan. Species recovery plans address threats that have been identified

through COSEWIC reports and a strategy is developed to correct or minimize factors that are leading to a species decline. In the case where insufficient information exists, the recovery plan must identify where information is lacking, and develop a list of studies that must be conducted to fill the gaps. According to SARA, if a species appears to be in threat of serious or irreversible damage, the minister in charge must act immediately, even in the absence of scientific certainty.

The Species At Risk Act Five Step Approach:



[http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/background/process\\_e.cfm](http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/background/process_e.cfm)

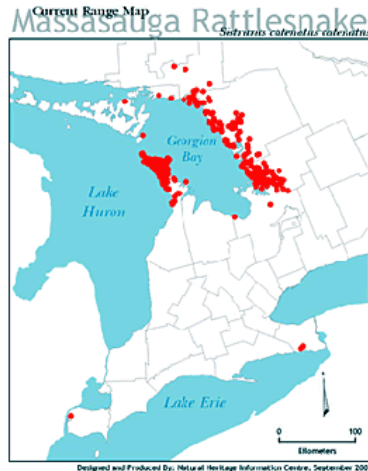
1. Research is conducted to determine if the species is at risk.
2. Information is gathered and condensed into a species account, the COSEWIC report. COSEWIC passes on the recommended status to the appropriate minister.
3. The minister responds by deciding whether to grant said status.
4. A recovery team is assembled and a recovery plan is generated.
5. With the recovery plan in effect, further research is conducted to determine how the species is responding, and if further action is necessary. Species assessments must occur at least every ten years according to SARA.

The whole process is cyclical and ongoing, ensuring that the necessary steps are always being taken to ensure survival of the species.

To put the process into perspective, the Massasauga rattlesnake was listed as threatened in 1991. This designation was afforded based on decreasing population sizes primarily caused by habitat destruction and

fragmentation. The report relied upon numerous studies of the four Ontario Massasauga populations and identification of critical habitat. COSEWIC members agreed upon the 'threatened' designation and the recommendation was passed to the Minister of the Environment who officially granted the Massasauga said status.

A recovery team was formed and a recovery plan was put into action. The recovery plan has two main objectives: 1) to "achieve viable populations of Massasaugas in tallgrass and peatland ecosystems" and 2) to "retain the current distribution, structure, and connectivity among local (sub-)populations throughout the Bruce Peninsula and Georgian Bay population regions." This would be achieved through public education and outreach, scientific research, monitoring and management of the species and its habitat, and habitat restoration of the two small southern Ontario populations.



In 2002, the Massasauga was re-evaluated and it was determined that the positive effects of the recovery efforts were offset by continued habitat destruction; the threatened status was again recommended. The Massasauga remains one of our 'species at risk' and continued efforts are being put forth to help ensure its survival.

The process of species designation through COSEWIC reports and the resulting recovery efforts are very helpful in organizing efforts to save our at-risk species. The greatest threat facing species around the world is habitat destruction. At current rates, many of our species will be facing extinction in the near future. Efforts must be made on all our parts in order to maintain the world's biodiversity.

**Editors Note: Steve Jones and Chris Edge (p.4) authored the 2005 COSEWIC Assessment and Update Status Report on Blanding's turtle in Canada.**

# Toronto Zoo Roads and Ecopassages Forum

March 20 - 22 2007

<http://www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/BlandingEcopassages.asp>

Road ecology is a growing field that explores the impacts of road networks on wildlife and examines potential mitigative solutions. It encompasses concepts that are especially important to planning new, as well as expanding existing, urban areas.

The goal of the forum is to create a working partnership and dialogue between road ecologists, biologists, urban planners, and road engineers. All are welcome, please register.

## Keynote Speakers

Dr. Matthew J. Aresco  
Lead Biologist, Lake Jackson Ecopassage Alliance, Inc.

Dr. Anthony J. Clevenger  
Lead Biologist, Banff National Park

Dr. Patricia Cramer  
USGS Utah Cooperative Fish & Wildlife Research Unit  
College of Natural Resources, Utah State University

Dr. Lenore Fahrig  
Department of Biology, Carlton University

Scott Jackson  
Holdsworth Natural Resource Center, University of Massachusetts

Patricia White  
Director, Habitat & Highways Campaign, Defenders of Wildlife



**Blanding's turtle in urban Toronto**  
© Dave Ireland

Conference Sponsors:



## **RIBBITS REVIEW – Kiss of Toad**

Written by Penn Kemp  
available through Pendas Productions 2007  
Reviewed by: Dave Ireland



*Kiss of Toad*, like all good fairy tales, is a book that speaks to us on many levels. It is, first of all, a story for children. "Once upon a time there lived Toad, down, down at the bottom of a well. He longed for greater things, for the sun, in fact". But before transformation is possible, Toad must relinquish his lifelong conception of who he is. He's already moved from egg to tadpole, out of his watery refuge and onto dry land. Now what? Toad is realistically described, but his changes are phenomenal.

Because of his endurance, his tenacity, his courage, Toad has always been a human ally, a culture hero. There lies within each of us a little bit of Toad. It is that part which grows downwards into the gnarled underworld. Our earth-born nature roots us to this planet, makes us build cozy homes of refuge against the winter storms. It is also that part of us that reaches deep down into the centre of the molten earth, into the fire which transforms the very 'toadiness' of our toad selves.

*Kiss of Toad* is a captivating story of search, separation, reunion, and attainment. *Kiss of Toad* takes us into a magical world to experience our deepest selves the way they are, and would like to be.

### **Volume 16. No.4**

**Amphibian Voice** is distributed to schools and communities participating in 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.

#### **Editors**

Dave Ireland,  
Adopt-A-Pond Coordinator  
Bob Johnson  
Curator of Reptiles & Amphibians

#### **Layout Manager**

Heather Marks

#### **Contributors**

Chris Edge  
Steve Jones  
Jacey Moore  
Jeff Parks  
David Watkins  
Victoria Wight

#### **Support for the Adopt-A-Pond Programme:**

Toronto Zoo Foundation  
Banrock Station Wetlands  
Foundation Canada

Adopt-A-Pond is a non-profit wetland education programme. Costs to produce this newsletter, and other resources, are funded by grants and private donations.

We welcome support of our programme! Please make cheques payable to "Toronto Zoo" and send them to the following address. Thank you!

Adopt-A-Pond  
Toronto Zoo



361A Old Finch Ave.  
Scarborough, ON M1B 5K7  
Fax: (416) 392-4979

[aap@torontozoo.ca](mailto:aap@torontozoo.ca)