



# Amphibian Voice

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Summer 2007

## Summer of the Turtle

### Tally Update

By: Ian McIntosh

The **Ontario Turtle Tally** is a fun and easy turtle monitoring project for individuals and community groups across Ontario. Since its inception in 2004 'The Tally', as it is affectionately referred to by Adopt-A-Pond members, has provided a forum to submit sightings of turtles across the province.

In fact, this year we have even started to receive submissions from outside of the province.

Reports of turtle sightings have come in from as far away as Texas. And in terms of diversity we have never had a better year for sightings. So far we have received information about Snapping, Blanding's, Painted, Eastern spiny softshell, Wood, Stinkpot, and Northern map turtles. The only turtle that hasn't been spotted is the Spotted turtle.

The Tally is growing and continuing to provide us with crucial information regarding the survivorship and distribution of turtles across Ontario. However, many more reports are needed.

Sightings of injured or killed turtles on roadways have increased. The programme values these accounts to locate hotspots of turtle mortality. But what these submissions also show us is that our threatened species are still very much in trouble.

Every sighting of a turtle is extremely important in helping us to understand their current population dynamics and develop conservation plans that will mitigate their decline.



The Adopt-A-Pond Wetland Conservation Programme would like to urge anyone that has seen a turtle in 2007 to please submit their sighting online at

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

*Please turn to pages 4-5 to see images from some of this year's Tally Submissions*

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**Editor's Note:** June is the month for turtle egg laying and it's the time when they're most active. So it's fitting that we've focused the 2007 Summer edition of Amphibian Voice on a summary of turtle issues to date. The cover story is an update on the Ontario Turtle Tally, which continues on to pages 4 and 5 with a photographic look at some of this year's sightings. We have reports from Adopt-A-Pond correspondent Christine Baptista, Turtle Tallier Yolanda Dewijk and Urban Turtle Initiative member Nicole Richards. And below is an account of this year's first annual Turtle Island Celebration held at Toronto Zoo.

Summer is a time when Canadians get active; humans and turtles alike!

## Turtle Island Celebration

By: Ian McIntosh



On June 21<sup>st</sup>, National Aboriginal Day, the Toronto Zoo hosted its first annual Turtle Island Celebration. The event was organized as part of the Zoo's commitment to create partnerships with First Nation communities as part of the "Ways of Knowing Turtle Island Conservation Partnership".

Participants from First Nation's School of Toronto, St. Martin School, and Eastview Junior Public School took part in traditional dancing, drumming, singing, and storytelling from leaders of Ontario's Aboriginal communities. Storyteller Elder, Jane Chartrand, taught us how Eagle got his white head. MorningStar River Drummers included everyone in an evocative Pow Wow. Hoop Dancer Nicole Shawana enthralled the crowd with dance. And Double "K" Bison provided a feast of bison burgers, fry bread, and traditional berry juice.

The theme for this year's celebration was Respect; Respect for ourselves, Respect for each other, and Respect for Mother Earth. Event organizer and First Nations Coordinator

Benny Michaud was quoted as saying "Our Turtle Island Celebration is an event which we hope will foster an understanding of the responsibility that all of us have to be keepers and protectors of turtles and Turtle Island."



**Eddy Robinson of MorningStar River Drummers performs a traditional grass dance.**

"Turtle Island" is a name used by many First Nations of North America. The name comes from the creation belief that Turtle offered his shell for others to live on and in so doing became the earth.

The Adopt-A-Pond Wetland Conservation Programme will foster this event as part of its Ways of Knowing Partnership with First Nations communities. The hope is to see the event grow and become a widely recognized celebration of National Aboriginal Day.

\* Partners of this event included Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte, Tyendingaga, Queen's University Aboriginal Teacher Education Program, and M'Chigneeng First Nation. Sponsors of the event included Barrock Station Wetland Foundation, Mountain Equipment Co-op, TD Friends of the Environment Foundation, Environment Canada's Aboriginal Capacity Building Fund and Habitat Stewardship Fund, and Canada Council for the Arts.



**Cameron McNab delivers an empowering speech to Peterborough County Council.**

## Kids are Strong Voice 4 Turtles

*By: Christine Baptista*

On July 4<sup>th</sup> a delegation of turtle conservationists led by dedicated children of Kids 4 Turtles addressed Peterborough politicians with a request that turtle crossing signs be reinstated in the county.

Their campaign began five years ago when Kids 4 Turtles, a group of children aged 4-13, raised \$4000 to have turtle crossing signs installed at sites of high turtle road mortality in Peterborough County.

County council members were originally receptive and enjoyed positive media attention for supporting the kid's efforts. However, during a meeting in June of this year (the month of highest turtle activity) council decided that they would no longer support the programme.

Cameron McNab, 13, helped orchestrate the campaign to convince councillors of the need to protect Ontario's turtles. "This country is obliged to do whatever it can," Cameron said. "We need continued support for turtle crossing signs and turtle conservation."

An online petition collected 1,166 signatures including that of world renowned environmentalist David Suzuki. "How on earth

do they expect young people to have respect for democracy and politicians when this so clearly flies in the face of what youth want," Suzuki wrote in a letter to the group.

One of council's main concerns was that they might start to receive crossing sign requests for other animals like mammals or birds. However, as the kids pointed out, turtles are different from all other animals. Turtles are long-lived. It takes a huge investment for one to reach sexual maturity (20+ years old in some cases). This means when one female turtle is killed it has a huge impact on the population, where other animals that reproduce quickly will rebound.

The yellow, diamond shaped signs are designed to make driver's aware of the need to watch out for turtles, and hopefully they will encourage people to learn more about the conservation issues surrounding these species.

The Toronto Zoo's Adopt-A-Pond Wetland Conservation Programme has funded signs in the past and has committed to pay for new signs. "It's an invaluable tool for public awareness," said Bob Johnson, Director of the



Adopt-A-Pond Programme and Curator of Reptiles and Amphibians at the Zoo. "Many people don't know that Ontario even has eight species of turtle, let alone that six of them are currently at risk."

After hours of debate councillors reversed their "hard-shelled" decision. Council has agreed to maintain the 42 existing signs in Peterborough, participate in the installation of new signs at provincially significant wetlands, and lobby the provincial government to have a standardized sign added to the Ministry of Transportation list.

Well done Cameron and Kids 4 Turtles!

# Moments from this year's Ontario Turtle Tally...





Blanding's © Mike Lawton



Blanding's © Deborah Twiddy



Snapping © Marion Muirhead



Painted © Tricia Sears



Snapping © Kim Boczkur



Northern Map © Nancy Westaway



Snapping © Heather Alexander



Wood © Bob Poirer



Painted © Robert Bernier



Snapping © Anne Lewis



Blanding's © Noreen Dertinger



Snapping © Shirley Perrin



Snapping © William Kennedy



Snapping © Ian McIntosh



Snapping © Geoffrey Chapman

# One of the Lucky Ones

By Yolanda Dewijk

Out for a Sunday drive on the way to Niagara on the Lake, I was interested to see something moving on the hill of a cemetery we were passing. At first, I thought from the size and colour, it might be a ground hog but looking again I realized it was a large turtle making its way down the hillside. We immediately turned the car around and pulled over to have a



Snapping Turtle approaching a road © AAP Staff

look. Up close we were able to see that it was a large snapping turtle with a beat up looking shell about ten inches long. Behind the turtle in the dewy grass was a clear trail of the turtle's progress. We followed the path as far as we could and were amazed to be able to trace her (we thought it was a "her" as it was June and the right time of year for egg laying) past movements for at least 30 meters before we could no longer tell where she had been. When we reached the top of the hill it was not at all clear where the turtle had come from. There was no pond or any other water body in that direction.

We hung around for a bit as the turtle was heading straight for a swamp on the other side of the road and we were concerned that she would be hit by a car as she tried to cross. However our attention did not seem to be inspiring her to move so we continued with our outing and left.

We could not get the turtle out of our minds though, so an hour later we were back at the cemetery looking for her. Once again we were able to follow her trail through the dewy grass. When we left she had been about fifty feet from the edge of the road. Now her path lead to the gravel shoulder and disappeared. As we did not find any dismaying remains littering the roadway we assumed she safely reached her destination. She must have been one of the lucky ones.

**You've seen a turtle?  
We want to hear about it!**



We need to learn more about Ontario's turtles & **YOU** can help. Identify turtles using our website, or ask for your free Turtle Tally kit by contacting Adopt-A-Pond at [aap@torontozoo.ca](mailto:aap@torontozoo.ca). Then simply log on to [www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/turtletally.asp](http://www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/turtletally.asp) to submit your observations. It's that easy! Good luck and happy turtling!

**For more information contact Adopt-A-Pond:**  
361A Old Finch Avenue Scarborough, ON M1B  
5K7 fax: 416.392.4979

**Join Turtle Tally!  
Help Save Ontario's  
Turtles!**

# Rumble in the Rouge

By Nicole Richards

Getting to see a snapping turtle up close is always an exhilarating experience. With their powerful jaws and sharp claws these turtles remind me of the dinosaurs that their ancestors once shared the earth with.

On June 15<sup>th</sup> 2007, another member of the Urban Turtle Initiative and I spotted one of the most amazing snapping turtle spectacles of all. While radio tracking as part of a 7 year research project, we were fortunate enough to be standing in the river when two large males emerged from the water like a couple of creatures from the black lagoon. These two rivals were in an epic battle, either for territory, access to a female in the area, or both. This clash had likely been in progress for a while as the adversaries had obvious war wounds and appeared tired, stopping periodically to rest.

Male snapping turtles will fight, and may do this to exclude rival males or gain access to a female. Social interactions seem limited to aggression or courtship since these are solitary creatures. Consequently, we felt particularly lucky to be witness to this display. We watched the combat for over an hour, with the two males battling it out. They grabbed at each other, biting; sometimes one would be on top of the other, forcing it under the water. At one point they left the water and grappled on the river bank, only to get back into the river and continue the aquatic wrestling. We were able to get very close to the action, since the turtles would pause and look at us but seemed much too preoccupied with the current battle to care about our presence. The rumble persisted

as the evening progressed and we had to leave these two guys to continue without the audience. We wished them luck and left, leaving it unknown who would be the ultimate "winner".

Note: Two previous turtles included in the UTI Study were named Storm and Rocky (Rocky after the movie) as they were found in an aggressive embrace following a large storm.



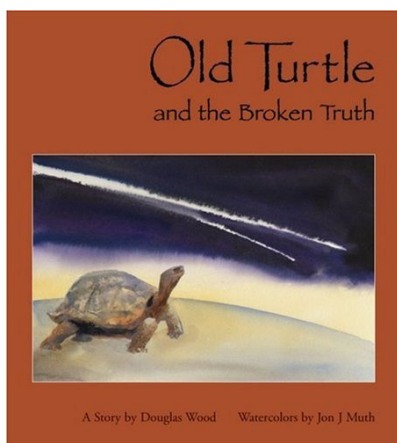
**November 3, 2007 is FrogWatch and  
Turtle Tally Appreciation Day at  
Toronto Zoo**

Lunch and lectures will be provided along with access to zoo exhibits.

However, space is limited so please RSVP as soon as possible. To reserve a spot contact Adopt-A-Pond at [aap@torontozoo.ca](mailto:aap@torontozoo.ca) / 416-392-5999

# Ribbit's review - Old Turtle and the Broken Truth

Written by Douglas Wood, Watercolours by Jon J Muth  
 Published by Scholastic Inc.  
 Reviewed by Ian McIntosh



*Old Turtle and the Broken Truth* is another wonderful parable from award winning author Douglas Wood. The story is about the knowing Old Turtle who promotes "learning lessons from stones and animals and trees and stars."

When a truth falls from the stars it breaks in half leaving a piece to be discovered by the animals of the forest. Each animal abandons the piece of truth until it is found by humans. The people cherish the half piece when they read on it "You are loved."

Over time, reverence for the piece of truth leads to jealousy and conflict. It becomes a little girl's mission to find harmony. The girl seeks the wisdom of Old Turtle who teaches us that there is not a single truth but "truths all around us, and within us." The second half of the broken truth is "And so are they."

*Old Turtle and the Broken Truth* is a beautiful tale about acceptance and understanding. It is a book containing both lessons and brilliant artwork that can be appreciated by all ages.

**Published:** October 1, 2003; **Published By:** Scholastic Inc.  
**ISBN:** 0439321093; **Cover Price:** \$21.99

## Volume 17, No. 2

**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.*

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

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