

# Amphibian Voice

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## Your Issue of Amphibian Voice 2008

### The Steward of Erieanu

By: Dianne Flook, Teacher

Even at the tender age of five, Jack Noble from Erieanu, Ontario had developed a passion for nature and especially turtles. He was born and raised on a unique sand spit peninsula called Erieanu near the southern tip of Lake Erie. The Erieanu peninsula is special because turtles of all varieties thrive on the rich, marshy bottom of Rondeau Bay and the sandy beaches of Lake Erie, both of which border Jack's home.



Jack Noble holding a Northern map turtle © Kathy Noble

strategic crossing points and he uses his Mom's restaurant in Erieanu to create awareness about the turtles' plight. Over six years, Jack's enthusiasm for helping and understanding turtles and their habitat has grown. In 2008 he earned an Ontario Turtle Tally award for his contribution to turtle conservation with 19 submissions that included data for 43 Northern map, 20 snapping, 16 painted and 2 Blanding's turtles.

Jack noticed that turtles had to compete with growing numbers of people, boat motors and automobiles and sadly, the turtles were losing. He realized that they needed a safe crossing between the bay and the lake to lay their eggs. He knew that their nesting sites needed protection. Jack decided to raise money and awareness by doing odd jobs to purchase turtle crossing signs. Each year, he and his dad continue to post and replace these signs at

#### In this Issue

Steward of Erieanu...	1
Snake lands.....	2
Red eared sliders... 3	
Snagged.....	4
Bobs Lake.....	5
HWY 24.....	6
Petrie Island.....	7
Kincardine .....	8

Jack Noble continues to advocate for his turtle friends who cannot speak for themselves. His dedication and passion are outstanding examples of one small voice making a large difference.

**Editor's Note:** The 2008 Fall issue of Amphibian Voice is entitled *Your Issue of Amphibian Voice* as this is the second Fall issue to focus on the seasonal exploits of our readers. The issue is full of submissions from your year spent in Wetlands whether FrogWatching, Turtle Tallying or just plain mucking around. The stories in this issue range from endearing to motivating. What's common between them all is your love for wetland communities and your strong desire to protect them and their inhabitants. We thank you for your hard work and commitment.

**NOVEMBER 1st, 2008 IS TURTLE TALLY AND FROGWATCH-ONTARIO APPRECIATION DAY AT TORONTO ZOO!!! Space is limited! Fills Quickly!**

**Lunch and lectures will be provided, along with access to Zoo exhibits. Space is limited, so please R.S.V.P. as soon as possible. To reserve a spot for this event, please contact Adopt-A-Pond at 416-392-5999 or [aap@torontozoo.ca](mailto:aap@torontozoo.ca). Special Guest: Toronto author Andrew Westoll**

## Wetlands are Snake lands

*By: Matt Ellerbeck, Conservation Educator*



A garter snake enjoying a spring meal © Matt Ellerbeck

For me the summer is a time to head out and explore wetlands. Wetlands are home to a wide array of interesting and significant creatures. Lush wetlands are home to a fascinating group of animals, the snakes.

Snakes can be found patrolling the shores of

these habitats in search of food, elegantly gliding on the top of the water, slithering in and out of emergent vegetation, or simply just basking in the sun.

A variety of snakes can be found in aquatic habitats. Most familiar is the garter snake. I often find these snakes near water where they hunt for small fish and frogs. One trip to a local island produced legions of garters as I walked along a path between two marshes. I couldn't even count them there were so many. Two of them were mating just above the surface of the water and only a few feet from this I spotted another swallowing a fish it had just caught. It was interesting how a legless 'tube' of an animal was able to handle such fiesty and slimy prey as a fish out of water.

Another snake that looks very similar to the common garter snake, but is more slender and has a small white spot in front of the eye, is the Eastern ribbon snake. Federally listed as a Species at Risk, ribbon snakes may still be locally abundant in certain locations. In the early summer I was lucky enough to find six of these snakes in less than an hour. Most of the snakes were seen gracefully swimming through the shallow waters of highly vegetated areas of ponds and marshes.

The most familiar wetland snake has to be the Northern Water Snake. I have seen them in beaver ponds, riverfronts, golf courses, marinas, and even basking on a Ferry dock. In one day I observed over 20 of these snakes in only an hour along the shores of a river. These snakes have a horrible reputation for being aggressive, however this mostly comes from people who have tried to handle these animals in the wild.

Many species of snake are persecuted. However, people do not need to fear these animals. If you encounter snakes, simply leave them alone and they will not feel the need to defend themselves. The bottom line is snakes want nothing to do with us. They merely want to go about there daily business of trying to survive. If we learn to co-exist with snakes peacefully we may be lucky enough to see these shy creatures in there natural habitat; swimming on the tops of the water, patrolling over the shoreline, or basking in the warm summer sun.

# Red Eared Sliders in Toronto – Where do they belong?

By: Dave Watkins, Turtle Tallyer

This year's Turtle Tally in Eglinton Flats started out much the same as any other year – early morning walks in the spring around Topham Pond. Observing nesting sites along the south shore and ravine area around this Jane and Eglinton park in Toronto. Neighbouring residents keeping a keen eye open for any wandering females who stray onto nearby streets. So not much different that any other year....all except for one small thing.

During one of these daily walks a family, Mom, Dad and two small children approached the pond area with a small box under Dad's arm. This family had decided to set their pet turtle free in the pond because they felt it was getting too big for their living quarters and possibly felt they were doing their rather large reptile a favour, releasing it into the wild.

So I introduced myself, explaining that their pet red-eared slider would probably not survive the winter and if on the off chance it did, it absolutely did not belong in an Ontario pond where it would compete for resources with native turtle species or introduce pests.



Red eared slider in Ontario wetland © Don Scallen

So what to do? Well you guessed it. I became the forever-home for a large red eared slider. I didn't know what I would be in for but "Stinky" has been an ambassador for red eared slider

education ever since. I get calls from all over Toronto from people who want to find a home for their sliders because they have either had them in an inappropriate habitat or didn't realize how big they could get or how long they live.

So how do you provide a habitat for these turtles? A pond of course. I have always wanted to build a pond in the backyard but with a non-native species to house, you need an entire enclosure. So up it went. It has taken all summer but it's done, not one but two small pond areas fully enclosed.



Enclosed outdoor RES habitat © Dave Watkins

Stinky now has 4 other companions, Shelly and Turtie who are a pair of 16 year old Red Eared Sliders that a family purchased while the kids were young. Now that these kids have gone away to College, no one wanted to look after them. And two small six inch sliders I adopted.

Providing homes for these pets can be a difficult task and everyone should know what NOT to do if the life-long commitment to these reptiles is missing. These reptiles can easily live up to 40 years plus and an appropriate, and somewhat costly, habitat must be provided to keep them healthy and happy.

As long as Stinky, Shelly, Turtie and the other two are around they will have a home with me. Basking in the hot sun outdoors all summer, and indoors under heat lamps in an aquarium over the winter. Where else can they go? So my best advise to those who want to spend more time with turtles – adopt a pond, because pets are a big commitment.

**Editor's Note:** For more information on red-eared sliders please visit <http://www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/Turtles.asp?tr=10>

# Snappy, The Snagged Turtle

*By: Courtney Felton, Turtle Tallyer*

On our last day at the cottage on Ril Lake, September 1<sup>st</sup> 2008, our family had the most exciting adventure. This was all thanks to Snappy, the large snapping turtle.

Throughout the day we were swimming, boating, sunbathing; but most of all, we were enjoying the perfect day. I was looking out at the flat water and noticed a small head pop up, then drop beneath the surface as quickly as it appeared. I didn't know what it was at first, so I called everyone over. When the crowd arrived the little head was nowhere to be seen.

Later on Andrew was sitting on the surf board floating his feet in the water when he screamed out, "Oh my! What was that?" He had felt something brush by his foot. We looked down and Snappy, the turtle, was swimming around the surf board. Snappy swam up behind us, at first out of sight, and then he nearly lifted himself onto the board. We were all laughing and joking around that the turtle was stalking us because we kept seeing him throughout the day and because we know that snapping turtles never bite people in the water.



Snapping turtle snagged with fishing line © Courtney Felton

**Editor's Note:** When encountering an injured turtle contact your local wildlife rescue centre or contact Adopt-A-Pond at 416-392-5999 for assistance

Cody and Ally were in our boat close by and could hear the excitement in our voices. When they paddled over, Cody noticed that Snappy had a long piece of fishing line hanging from his mouth. While holding the line, we were able to prop Snappy onto a paddle to get a better look. We saw that the fishing line was tied to a hook stuck deep in Snappy's throat. Some fisherman had hooked him and simply cut the line. Our neighbour, John, had the great idea of putting Snappy in a dog crate while we called for help.



Snappy being transported © Courtney Felton

Wearing fishing gloves, Cody picked Snappy up by the rear of his shell and placed him in the crate. Once Snappy was secured, Cody and John carried the crate onto the beach where they submerged it half in the water and half on the sand. We then called the MNR, but unfortunately were not able to get direction on what to do.

So we all decided the best thing we could do to help the turtle was to cut the line as close as we could to the hook. We gently pulled Snappy close to the side of the crate and cut the line beside its mouth. Once the line was cut we opened the dog crate door and Snappy swam free. Snappy swam around the area for awhile that day then swam away. Since then we haven't seen Snappy back.

We learned afterwards that there are organizations in the area that help in these situations; one is called A Wing & A Prayer located near Huntsville. All we hope is that Snappy is alive and well, and that more people consider using circle hooks instead of "J" hooks when fishing to minimize accidents like this one!

# Bobs Lake Turtle Tally 2008

By: Pat Grace, Turtle Tallyer

When my wife, Cathie and I built our cottage eighteen years ago on Bobs Lake near Mica Point we did not include a turtle nursery in our plans. But to our joyful surprise many turtles travel along the local gravel road and through neighbouring properties to nest here.



Raccoon raided nest © Pat Grace

Most of our yearly nesting visitors are Northern map turtles, and we do a pretty good job spotting them. During this year's Turtle Tally we saw 28 maps on our property plus 2 snappers, 1 Blanding's, and 1 midland painted turtle using local roads. However, even before our first turtle sighting on June 5<sup>th</sup>, a couple of map turtle nests had already been destroyed by raccoons. In total we lost 10 nest to raccoons this year.

Northern Map Turtles take about an hour or longer to complete a nest. They do all of the work with their hind legs to dig, lay the eggs and cover the nest. Then, if left alone, the local raccoons will eat the eggs through the night leaving the shells around the nest. For years I have tried, with limited success, to protect some turtle nests from raccoons. This year I was able to protect six nests but lost one of these when I tried removing the protection after six days. We're doing all we can, but the turtles are just facing so many challenges. For example, on July 2<sup>nd</sup> the last map turtle came here to nest. Cathie named her Mabel. I


photographed her at 10:17 AM in perfect health and by 10:25 she had been mortally injured by a delivery cube van. She was hit within 10 m of our cottage on a very quiet road. One of her eggs was found broken on the gravel. I made numerous phone calls to see what I could do for Mabel while Cathie kept an eye on her. Mabel walked across the road and then over 30 meters into shade on a neighbour's property.

I placed Mabel into a pet carrier and drove her to the Beardall Animal Hospital in Kingston. She scratched regularly during the trip to remind me that she was still alive. The next day I heard that Mabel's injuries were too serious. They told me that Mabel was a large young turtle and that she was feisty until the end. Mabel, looking to be in her mid-twenties, could have laid about 500 to 800 more eggs during her life if she hadn't been hit on the road. It will take hundreds of eggs and 20 years to replace Mabel's reproductive potential.

With the loss of Mabel we feel like we lost the battle to protect turtles this year, but it has only inspired us to try harder. Next year we hope to have turtle signs posted before spring and our nest protection strategy perfected.

## LEAP-FROG

### WORLD RECORD™ ATTEMPT!





**Date: Friday, November 14, 2008**  
**Location: Toronto Zoo Main Parking Lot**  
**Time: 9:30am to 12:30pm**  
Registration begins at 9:30am  
Event begins at 11:30am

**NO ADMISSION FEE**  
to participate and parking is FREE day of the event.

**LEAPING LIZARDS BONUS!**  
Participants of the event receive 1/2 price Zoo admission on the day of the event!\*

We invite Leapers of ALL ages to participate!  
Visit [torontozoo.com](http://torontozoo.com) for more details and register now...HOP TO IT!



2008 YEAR OF THE FROG

# Blanding's on Hwy 24

*By: Don Scallen, Turtle Tallyer*

On the morning of April 16 2008 I was southbound on Hwy 24 just below Brantford. The familiar shape of "turtle on road" caught my eye. Even from a distance the identification was simple - dark, domed shell, larger than a painted turtle. It could only be a Blanding's. Unfortunately it had been hit and killed. Walking the shoulders of the highway that morning I reeled from the discovery of eight dead Blanding's turtles and most had been struck by cars that very morning. Here was horrific testimony to the impact that roads exact on our turtles.



Turtle fence installation at HWY 24 © Don Scallen

Mercifully, not all of the turtles that I found were dead. Three beautiful Blanding's were waiting in the grass on the east side of the highway facing west, waiting to step out into the constant stream of cars. I carried the turtles across the highway and released them into the marsh they were intent on reaching. Later that day I returned to find yet another dead Blanding's turtle and one painted.

I was depressed and frustrated for I thought little could or would be done to stem this tide of turtle death. This population of Blanding's turtles, once probably very robust, would dwindle and then disappear. Imagine my surprise then when I discovered that something in fact would be done to mitigate this threat. The cavalry came from the Ministry of Transportation and Toronto

Zoo's Adopt-A-Pond staff in response to a Turtle Tally submission I made about the incident.

On May 1st we met at the site. In addition to the Blanding's, a large snapping turtle lay dead at the side of the road. We discussed erecting temporary fencing on both sides of the highway to direct migrating turtles to an existing culvert running under the highway. It was hoped that such a barrier could be installed before any late summer return movement of the Blanding's turtles. Time was short but both the Toronto Zoo and the Ministry of Transportation were up to the challenge. On August 13<sup>th</sup>, less than four months after I found the dead turtles, the fencing was in place.

The MTO, especially Adele Mochrie and Rick Hofstetter, Steed and Evans Limited, and Toronto Zoo deserve a great deal of credit for arranging funding and satisfying various government regulations in such short order to make this project a reality. They responded to an ecological disaster with decisive action. I was heartened. The hopelessness I felt as I walked among the dead turtles on that April morning had been replaced with optimism, albeit of the "guarded" variety.

Why guarded optimism? Well the fencing is temporary. A more permanent barrier may be erected if it can be demonstrated that the temporary fencing is performing as intended - that it is saving the turtles at this site. It will be important to monitor the fencing in spring and fall to try to gauge how it may be helping to divert wildlife to the culvert. I hope that the need for a permanent barrier can be demonstrated. If so, the next challenge would be to find the much greater level of funding needed to put such a permanent barrier in place.

Cars traveling the roads that network our province, have been destroying our turtles for almost 100 years - a largely unnoticed tragedy that is depriving us of a wonderful part of our natural heritage. It is important that we try to find ways to redress this wrong. The highway 24 barrier is a small, but important step towards this. Perhaps it will serve to inform and inspire similar efforts elsewhere.

**Editor's Note:** To learn more about the affects of roads on wildlife please go to

<http://www.torontozoo.com/conservation/RoadEcologyGroup.asp>

# Petrie Island Turtles

By: Richard Burnford, Turtle Researcher



Petrie Island is on the Ottawa River, approximately 20 km east of Parliament Hill and adjacent to the Ottawa suburb of Orléans. Almost all of the Island is within a provincially significant wetland and candidate Area of Natural and

Scientific Interest (ANSI) and it has long been noted for its natural and recreational values. Four native species of turtle (Snapping, Painted, Northern Map, and Blanding's) have been observed on the Island in recent years, as has the non-native Red-Eared Slider.

Since 2006 the Friends of Petrie Island (FOPI) and the Ottawa Stewardship Council (OSC) have conducted surveys of nesting turtles on Petrie Island. The objective is to learn more about turtles and their nesting sites, with a view to protecting these species and their habitat. More than 50 nesting turtles and 150 depredated nests were observed in 2006, with a slightly lower number in 2007, possibly due to the unusually high water levels that year.

In 2008, the survey narrowed its focus to species-at-risk turtles, in particular, the Northern Map and Blanding's (Threatened). The survey was conducted by volunteers and staff of FOPI and the OSC during the spring and early summer of 2008. A core survey team of two individuals (myself and Bill Bower) walked, canoed the area for a combined total of more than 70 hours over 26 days. In addition, FOPI volunteers and staff monitored as part of their daily routine when on the island. The general public were also invited, by means of emails, brochures, and posters, to report sightings of turtles. An online report form, similar to that used by Ontario Turtle Tally, was available on the FOPI website.

Overall, the survey was a success and met its objectives. 2008 is the fourth consecutive year that there have been confirmed sightings of Blanding's turtles on the Island. These sightings are, however, few - one or two per year - even though some have been seen in very public places (a municipal park is adjacent to the wetlands). The survey team was also able to locate habitat used by Northern map turtles for basking and nesting. Northern map turtles are frequently seen around the Island from late spring to early summer and it is not unusual to see more than 20 basking on a given day. Northern Map juveniles were also observed in June and July, indicating that at least some nests survive the heavy toll of depredation by raccoons and other human subsidized urban predators.



Nesting Northern map turtle © Richard Burnford

The 2008 survey continued a partnership of the Friends of Petrie Island and the Ottawa Stewardship Council. While most of the field-work was done by volunteers, the survey would not have been possible without the expert advice and assistance of Joffre Côté, a biologist with OMNR and the coordinator for the OSC. Our thoughts are now turning to assessing the implications of what we have learned and to planning for future years.

For more information on Petrie Island Turtle Surveys, please go to [www.petrieisland.org](http://www.petrieisland.org)

For more information on the Ottawa Stewardship Council please go to [www.easternontariostewardship.org/ottawa/index.html](http://www.easternontariostewardship.org/ottawa/index.html)

For information on Ontario Turtle Tally please go to <http://www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/TurtleTally.asp>

# Kincardine Turtle Guardian

By: Sheryl Elliott, Turtle Tallyer



Jorie Elliott receives help to post turtle crossing sign

The turtle population in Kincardine, Ontario is a little safer these days thanks to the efforts of 11 year old self-proclaimed turtle activist Jorie Elliott. Jorie, a long-time turtle lover, noticed over the past few years that many of Kincardine's turtles cross busy Bruce Avenue to make their way from a lagoon to a sandy area to lay their eggs. After helping many turtles cross the road herself on her way to town and hearing stories from others of their efforts to help turtles get across the road safely, Jorie, at age 10, decided it was time to take action. She wrote her first letter to the Municipality of Kincardine about her concerns that turtles would get killed trying to cross the street and included a drawing of what the signs could look like. Jorie received a response immediately from the municipality with a promise to monitor the situation. Months later, after not hearing further from the town, Jorie sent a business card and another letter, in the form of a persuasive essay using the skills she learned in grade 5 at Ripley Huron Community School. Her letter included research she found about Ontario's turtle population and how 6 of Ontario's 8 species of turtle are at-risk. Jorie's two-year crusade paid off as the Municipality agreed to honour her request and set about searching for a source for a turtle crossing sign similar to the sign drawn on Jorie's first letter. Although the municipality was willing to foot the bill, Jorie set out to raise money to pay for the signs herself. On July 10, 2008, Jorie met with the municipality and media to present \$92 she had raised and to erect the long-awaited signs on Bruce Avenue. Jorie put the signs up with the help of Municipal staff. Although Jorie is thrilled about her turtle crossing, her efforts to preserve Ontario's turtle population are not over. Jorie continues to raise money for future turtle projects in the Kincardine and participates in the Toronto Zoo's Turtle Tally where she has been awarded a certificate for her contribution to turtle conservation.

## Volume 18 , No.3

**Amphibian Voice** is distributed to schools and communities participating in the Adopt-A-Pond programme. The purpose of this newsletter is to celebrate wetland conservation 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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### **Support for the Adopt-A-Pond Programme:**

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