



# Amphibian Voice

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## Urban Conservation

### Rouge National Park: Canada's 46<sup>th</sup> National Park?

*Brandon Ackerman, Dunbarton High School (Grade 12)*

In 1956, there was a dream when the Rouge Duffins Highland Petticoat Conservation Authority decided that the City of Toronto needed a protected natural area. Nearly 40 years later that dream became a reality. In 1990, the Province of Ontario announced its intention to have the lands surrounding the Rouge River become a protected natural area. Since that time, Rouge Park has grown to 47 km<sup>2</sup> in size, and holds the title as the largest urban park in North America.

Now, the vision has become even larger, with the Rouge Park Alliance soliciting support to turn Rouge Park into Canada's 46<sup>th</sup> National Park. This would protect endangered species,

essential green space within the ever-growing metropolis of the Greater Toronto Area.

As it is envisioned, the Rouge National Park will protect ecologically and historically significant land between Pickering and Toronto. This will include forests, wetlands, and meadows that span from the shore of Lake Ontario up to the park's most northern edge at the post glacial Oak Ridges Moraine. Parts of the land encompassed by the park are located in the Carolinian zone. Also known as the eastern deciduous forest region, the Carolinian zone represents less than 1% of the country's total land mass, and provides more habitat to species at risk than any other region of Canada. The park would protect diverse

populations of animals, including species at risk such as eastern ribbon snakes, Jefferson salamanders and Blanding's turtles.



But not only will endangered species benefit - so will other wildlife such as white-tailed deer, leopard frogs, and goldfinches.

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historical sites, working farms, human history and the citizens of Toronto from urban sprawl by preserving a significant amount of

In addition to providing ecologically significant habitat to wildlife in an urbanized landscape, the park will also protect various historic sites and engage visitors in learning about human life as it existed more than 10 000 years ago. Agricultural properties will also be protected from future development around the park to prevent degradation of healthy farm land. In addition, several areas would be secured for recreational activities such as hiking, canoeing, seasonal fishing, kayaking, photography, and more. If Rouge Park is granted national park status, prospective lands that slotted for protection during expansion of the park would span over 161 km<sup>2</sup>.



Rouge Park Forest. Photo courtesy of:

[www.rougepark.com/explore/virtual/gallery/pages/forest.php](http://www.rougepark.com/explore/virtual/gallery/pages/forest.php).

The Rouge Park Alliance has an ambitious schedule with several future objectives. Among these are plans to build an Interpretive Centre for Rouge National Park, improve water quality in all rivers, create new wetlands within the park, protect endangered species by advocating for research, and restore heritage sites and local food production.

Rouge Park is currently 13 times as big as Central Park in New York City and 33 times as big as London's Hyde Park. Should the ambition to become a National Park be fulfilled, the amount of wilderness to be protected within the boundaries of an urban landscape would be larger than any other known urban park in the world! To learn more about the Rouge Park Alliance and how you can get involved in helping Rouge Park become Canada's 46<sup>th</sup> national park, visit [www.rougenationalpark.ca/default.asp](http://www.rougenationalpark.ca/default.asp).

## Ontario Road Ecology Group: Driving Home the Need for Safer Roads for Wildlife

*Mandy Karch, OREG Project 400 Coordinator*

Established in 2007, the Ontario Road Ecology Group (OREG) raises awareness about the threats of roads to biodiversity in Ontario and advocates for research and mitigation. The science of road ecology explores the interaction of organisms and the environment as they relate to roads and transportation networks. It is recognized and accepted that roads fragment, degrade and destroy habitat, lead to animal-vehicle collisions and are a source of noise, light and chemical pollution. Better planned and constructed roads will not only protect biodiversity, but will limit urban sprawl and the consumption of agricultural land and Natural Heritage Systems.

No point in southern Ontario is more than 1.5 km from a road, yet this region is home to the greatest biodiversity in Canada. Of the species that live in southern Ontario, 35% have been listed as Species at Risk (SAR) and almost half of these species are at risk of further decline due to road mortality threats. Because roads are everywhere and easily accessible, YOU can help protect all animals including SAR by following these simple steps:

- 1) Drive with caution and be aware of animals crossing the road.
- 2) If you see a turtle crossing the road, or a snake basking on the road, when it is safe to do so, help move the animal to safety. For turtles, it is important to move the animal in the same direction it was heading (most turtles you encounter on land will be females on their way to nest sites).
- 3) Report animal sightings on/next to roads at: [www.torontozoo.com/Conservation/RoadEcologyGroup.asp?pg=sighting](http://www.torontozoo.com/Conservation/RoadEcologyGroup.asp?pg=sighting).

If you have any questions or concerns about biodiversity and roads please write to [mkarch@torontozoo.ca](mailto:mkarch@torontozoo.ca).



# How to Build a Frog Pond in Your Own Backyard

*Taylor Hardy, Sir Sanford Fleming College (3<sup>rd</sup> Year, Fish and Wildlife Program)*

Thinking of building a backyard frog pond? The first thing you'll want to do is choose the proper location for your froggy wetland. It should be situated in a spot that will receive part sun and part shade. It should also be located away from sources of fertilizer or chemicals, and not be directly connected to any other waterway so that outside contaminants and unwanted frog predators can't invade your pond. Take care to ensure that the pond is positioned away from you and your neighbours' windows as frogs can be very loud creatures! You can choose to build your pond in an area that receives melt water or you can direct your downspout to fill the pond during heavy rainfall events.



The pond should be excavated so that it has a minimum surface area of about 8 ft by 10 ft and a minimum depth of 3 - 4 ft so that frogs can overwinter in your backyard. If the pond is too shallow or too small the frogs will either freeze or not have enough oxygen to survive through the winter. An air pump can be used if you require a shallower pond - the constant movement of water will prevent it from freezing through entirely, and the water will be enriched with oxygen, an essential element for amphibian survival during aquatic hibernation. Be sure to provide protection for frogs from predators too. This can be done by adding plants, rocks and logs to your pond that will allow frogs to hide themselves.

You can also dig a smaller pond connected to a larger one so that the spring rain will flood into the second pond and create a temporary breeding pool (ephemeral pool) for the frogs which will dry up in the summer. Once the ponds are excavated to the desirable dimensions a sloping gradient should be

shaped along the pond edge so that frogs can move in and out of the water as they please. It is important to select an appropriate area for your pond where the soils can hold water and the sun will not evaporate the pond entirely (good areas that will retain water are those that are commonly flooded already or those that contain a high percentage of clay and allow you to press the soil into a "Play-Doh like" ribbon). Ideally, the foundation of your wetland would include a mixture of mud, silty clay, rocks and pebbles.

To naturalize your wetland and provide frogs with protection from predators, you should plant NATIVE species of trees, aquatic plants, clumping sedges, grasses and wildflowers (flowers will attract insects) (see table below). These plants will also reduce wind movement, increase humidity within the pond and, in the fall, add detritus (dead leaves), which will provide additional cover for overwintering frogs and add nutrients for algal growth once winter is over. Fish will eat the eggs and tadpoles of breeding frogs as well as aquatic insects and larva that are essential prey items for frogs, so if you're building a pond with frogs specifically in mind, it is best not to include fish. Once your pond is created maintenance should be minimal as it will become a self contained ecosystem, so enjoy watching your new backyard frog pond come to life!

## Some suggested native plants for your frog pond:

Trees	Red maple, Ashes (black, mountain or white), basswood, black cherry, hawthorns or oaks (conifers will poison the water once needles drop)
Aquatic Plants	White pond lilies, bull (yellow) pond lilies, hard stem bull rush, pickerel weed, arrowheads, cattails, water plantains, water-shields, large fruited and floating bur-reeds
Sedges	Wool grass, spikerushes, lake sedges, fringed sedges, and sensitive ferns (not a sedge)
Grasses	Marsh timothy, Canada blue joint and wild rice
Flowers	Swamp milkweed, spotted touch-me-not (jewelweed), cardinal flower, blue vervain, marsh marigold and spotted joe-pye weed

# Ontario Turtle Tally Experiences Most Successful Year to Date!

*Julia Phillips, Adopt-A-Pond Coordinator*

The staff and friends of the Adopt-A-Pond Wetland Conservation Programme would like to thank all Ontario Turtle Tally observers for making 2009 a record-breaking year! Thanks to unprecedented participation and support we have collected more information on the status of Ontario's turtle populations in 2009 than in any other year of the programme's history!

Since the inception of Ontario Turtle Tally in 2002, 886 participants have become involved. Over 440 new participants signed on to help monitor and protect Ontario's turtles this year, more than doubling annual project participation! Over 1100 new observations have been entered since March 2009 and locations and ecological data have been collected for 3858 individual turtles (many submissions report more than one sighting) – that's more than 10 turtle sightings submitted for each day of the Tally!

Over 50% of observations submitted in 2009 reported species at risk turtles. The participant who submitted the highest number of observations was Don Scallen of Georgetown, Ontario, an avid kayaker and turtle enthusiast! The most common species at risk reported in 2009 was the Northern Map Turtle (*Graptemys geographica*), which is listed as a species of Special Concern by provincial and federal wildlife conservation agencies COSSARO (Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario) and COSEWIC (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada).



Spotted Turtle (photo by Don Scallen)

The following is a break-down of the number of each species reported as of December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009:

Painted Turtle (not at risk)	1811
Northern Map Turtle (Special Concern)	1114
Snapping Turtle (Special Concern)	608
Blanding's Turtle (Threatened)	117
Spiny Softshell (Threatened)	63
Spotted Turtle (Endangered)	31
Stinkpot Turtle (Threatened)	11
Wood Turtle (Endangered)	10
Unknown Species	37
Red-eared Slider (non-native species)	56



Blanding's Turtle (photo by Jennifer Robertson)

This year 118 turtles were helped across the road during nesting season (late May - mid-July) and 162 nesting locations were recorded! Road mortality poses a major threat to the sustainability of turtle populations in Ontario, but with every turtle that you assist you increase the potential for future generations to be born.

Seven of Ontario's 8 native species of turtles are at risk of becoming extinct. Every sighting, whether it is of a relatively common species like the Painted Turtle, or of a rare species like the Wood Turtle is important to us! Sightings of dead turtles help us too; they can provide us with valuable information on road mortality hotspots or habitats in need of protection. The data collected through Turtle Tally is shared with biologists to create range maps of species distributions across the province and helps to identify critical turtle habitat. For more information on how you can help protect turtle species at risk please visit: [www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/turtletally.asp](http://www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/turtletally.asp), or email [aap@torontozoo.ca](mailto:aap@torontozoo.ca) to receive a Turtle Tally package that will help you get started!

# FrogWatch Review: A Spectacular Year for Amphibian Sightings!

Julia Phillips, Adopt-A-Pond Coordinator

2009 has been a great one for Frog Watchers all across the province! FrogWatch Ontario is a fun, easy monitoring project for people of all ages; in Ontario the project is run by the Adopt-A-Pond Programme in partnership with Environment Canada's Ecological Monitoring and Assessment Network (EMAN) and the Natural Heritage Information Centre (NHIC) at the Ministry of Natural Resources.

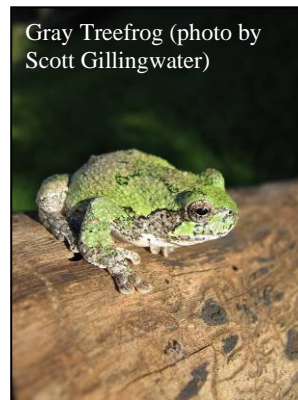
To date, over 11, 000 observations have been made by 575 different observers in 840 locations across the province. Data collected in 2009 added 48 observers, 1493 observations and 67 new habitat locations to the count, closely rivalling last year's participation and observation numbers! Adopt-A-Pond staff and supporters would like to thank each and every frog and toad observer for getting involved and helping FrogWatch Ontario grow by leaps and bounds!

The observer with the highest number of observations in 2009 was Lan Green with 191 submissions! The most common species reported this year was the Spring Peeper (*Pseudacris crucifer*).



Spring Peeper (photo by Christine Smith)

Scientists consider frogs and toads (and all other amphibians, including salamanders and caecilians) to be one of the primary indicators of environmental degradation. This is because amphibians easily absorb pollutants through their porous skin, and also because they have both aquatic and terrestrial life stages, and are



Gray Treefrog (photo by Scott Gillingwater)

therefore exposed to the resulting consequence of either habitat type being altered. Frog and toad species are declining world-wide and in Ontario one frog and one toad species have already been classified as species at risk. Data collected through

FrogWatch Ontario helps scientists track critical wetland habitats that support amphibian wildlife and determine the distribution of declining species.

In 2009, species at risk observations accounted for <1% of the frogs and toads seen or heard. A breakdown of the 2009 species counts as of December 4<sup>th</sup> is listed below:

Spring Peeper	291
Green Frog	261
American Toad	221
Wood Frog	111
Gray Treefrog	101
Western Chorus Frog	72
Leopard Frog	69
Boreal Chorus Frog	51
Bullfrog	51
Mink Frog	10
Fowler's Toad (Threatened)	7
Cricket Frog (Endangered)	2
Unknown Species	207
Non-native Species (e.g. Oregon Spotted Frog)	26

We need your help to protect Ontario's frogs and toads! For more information on how you can get involved in the conservation of Ontario's amphibians please visit the FrogWatch website at: [www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/FrogwatchOntario.asp](http://www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/FrogwatchOntario.asp) or email [aap@torontozoo.ca](mailto:aap@torontozoo.ca) to receive a FrogWatch package in the mail!



Fowler's Toad (photo by AAP staff)

# Marketing Conservation?

*Erin Nadeau, Adopt-A-Pond Turtle Stewardship  
and Social Marketing Coordinator*

While you may not initially think that the terms “marketing” and “conservation” go together you might be surprised to find out how wrong you are. Each time you make a submission to Frogwatch or Turtle Tally, assist a turtle in crossing a road, or clean up litter from a wetland you have chosen to take part in a conservation action. Just like you choose to buy a particular product or attend a particular event, you are making a choice based on a variety of factors, and as such can be influenced by marketing. As you can well imagine however marketing conservation is not as straight forward as marketing a running shoe or a brand of cereal. The reasons that people engage in behaviours are complex and are not the same for each person or group of people. Community-Based Social Marketing is a type of marketing that works just a little differently and tries to recognize these complexities. It utilizes tools such as surveys and focus groups to better understand human behaviour and to develop marketing programs that address the barriers and benefits related to these behaviours.

Over the last several months, and continuing over the next year Adopt-A-Pond will be applying the concepts and tools of Community Based Social Marketing to our conservation endeavours. It is hoped that by better understanding why people get involved turtle conservation programs and what it is that makes particular people enjoy and respect these animals we can better develop the Adopt-A-Pond programme and ultimately change the fate of Ontario’s species at risk turtles.



Stay tuned to upcoming issues of Amphibian Voice to hear more about this project and how you can be a part of this exciting social research!

## **Workshop – Social Marketing and Chelonian Sustainability: Changing Minds to Change the Fate of Turtles**

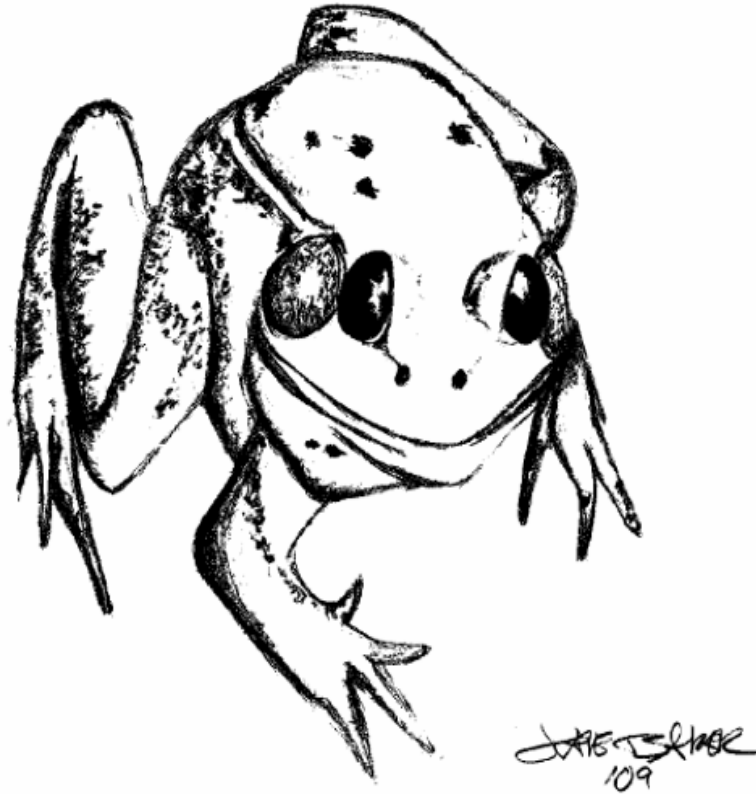
On March 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010 the Adopt-A-Pond Programme will be hosting its biannual workshop for individuals interested in the conservation of Species at Risk turtles. The workshop will examine current issues impacting the sustainability of turtle populations in Ontario, with topics that include primary threats, life history features, and a special session on snapping turtles. The workshop will also examine the importance of relaying this valuable information to the public in ways that will inspire conservation action using community-based social marketing strategies. For more information please visit the Events section of our website at [www.torontozoo.ca/adoptapond](http://www.torontozoo.ca/adoptapond).



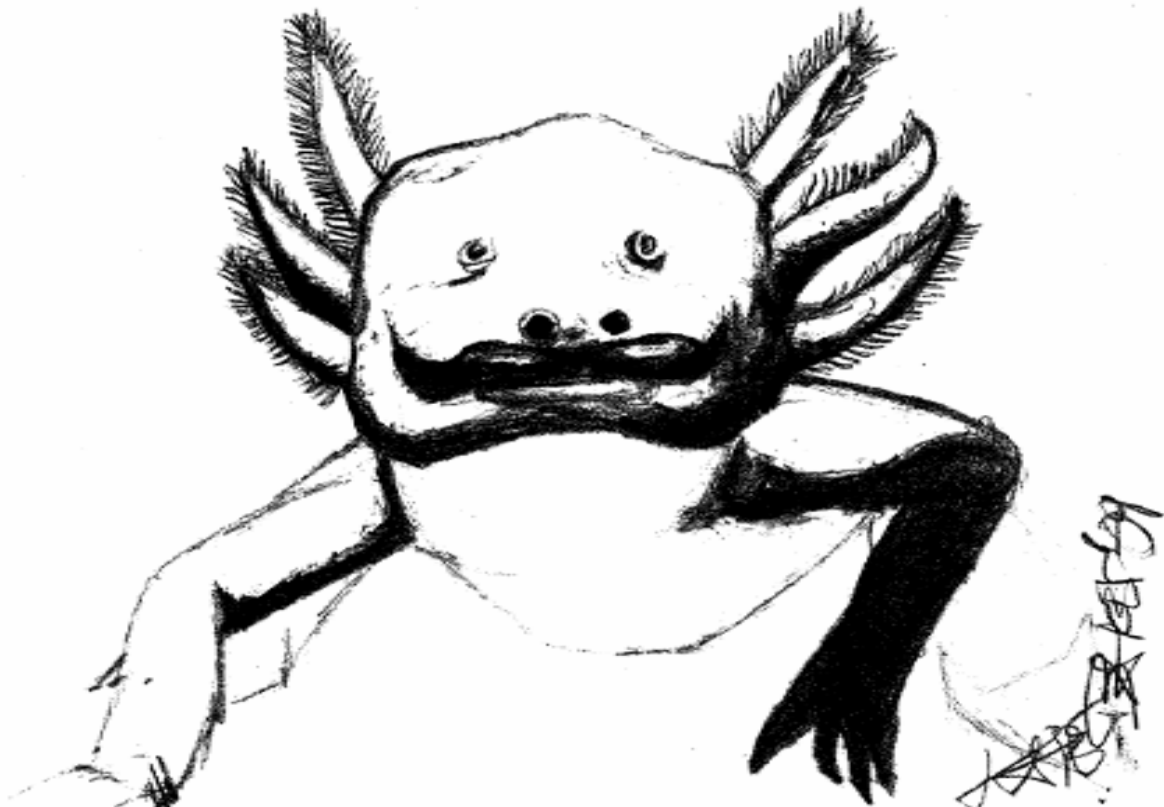


May 1-2, 2010 - Our annual *Spring Toad Festival* is scheduled around the explosive breeding ritual of American toads at Toronto Zoo's very own Americas Wetland Outdoor Exhibit. Come celebrate the arrival of spring by experiencing the frenzied courtship of toads and frogs on May 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2009! There will be lots of fun activities for kids and adults alike, including: touch-tables with live specimens, face painting, Toady the mascot, lessons on tracking wildlife using GPS technology, and instruction on how you can get involved as a FrogWatcher or Turtle Detective. Come and join in the "ribbiting" good fun! For more information please visit the Events section of our website at: [www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond](http://www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond).

Artist's Corner



*"Mink Frog" by Kate Baker, York University (4<sup>th</sup> Year)*

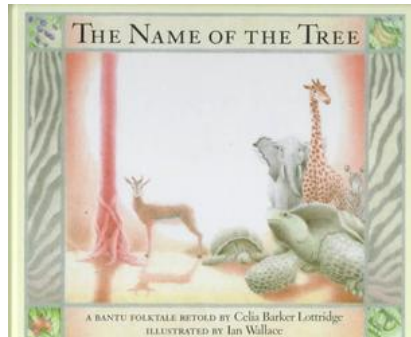


*"Mudpuppy" by Kate Baker, York University (4<sup>th</sup> Year)*



## Ribbit's Review - The Name of the Tree

Written by Celia Barker Lottridge  
Illustrated by Ian Wallace  
*Reviewed by Brandon Ackerman*



This is a great short story by a Canadian author and one that is ideal for kids of all ages to read. The story begins by introducing the reader to a group of hungry animals wandering in the land of short grass. An ostrich, gazelle, giraffe, monkey, rabbit, zebra and tortoise come together on a quest to feed their aching bellies, but what unfolds is the tale of an unlikely hero. Desperate in their search for food, the group of animals wanders at great lengths across a barren landscape, but even after grand efforts they find nothing of value. But then the wandering creatures come across a fruit tree ornamented with a fruit they have never seen before, and the course of their efforts and attitudes is altered forever. The wise, slow tortoise tells the other animals that in order to be able to reach the fruit they must know the name of the tree that bears it, and that only the King knows the name of the tree. One by one, each animal travels to the King seeking the name of the unknown tree, but one by one, each returns with an empty mind and an empty stomach, having forgotten the name that was offered to them. Despite the other animals' doubts that the tortoise will be any more successful than they have been in remembering the much sought after name, the tortoise bravely offers to go to the King. When the tortoise returns he holds a secret that will save the kingdom...

In this remarkable tale of the power of one the reader learns that even when you are small and slow, you can make a difference in the lives of others. The reader is offered a valuable life lesson – that, while you may have weaknesses in some areas of life, it is your drive and initiative that will make you powerful in others!

Publisher: A Groundwood Book  
Publication Date: August 1, 1989  
ISBN: 0888990979

## Volume 19, 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 happily include them in future issues.*

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We welcome your support of our programme! If you are interested in making a donation, please make cheques payable to "Toronto Zoo" and send them to the following address. Thank you!

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