



# Amphibian Voice

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## Conservation in Action!

Reptile and Amphibian Conservation: A Year in Review

Young Naturalist Shares His Turtle Knowledge

*By: Jack Noble*

**Editor's Note:** Jack Noble has been a loyal member of Turtle Tally for the past several years. He is a keen young naturalist and a great asset to the team at Adopt-A-Pond. Below is an article he wrote about his experience speaking to children at his local yacht club about one of his favourite things: turtles!

This past summer I was invited to speak to a group of children at the Eriean Yacht Club about turtles in our area. I was excited to talk about something I know a lot about and to be able to share this with the kids. The Yacht Club has a summer program with children of various ages and teaches swimming, sailing and kayaking, so they see a lot of turtles in Rondeau Bay.

They were excited to have me come and they were very interested and asked a lot of questions. The children were very happy to receive the fridge magnets and all the information that the Toronto Zoo had given me to hand out. I am sure that they left with a new knowledge of the turtles, and how to keep them safe.

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Jack talking about the turtles of Ontario with young members of the Eriean Yacht Club.  
Photo: Kathy Noble

# Conservation of Blanding's Turtles at the Toronto Zoo

*By: Heater McWhinnie  
Co-op Student, Dunbarton Highschool*

I am a highschool co-op student that was fortunate enough to get a placement at the Toronto Zoo in September 2010. Once I began co-op I came to understand the meaning of the terms threatened and endangered, and in which of these categories each of the Ontario turtles fall. What I learned was that the species I worked with, the Blanding's turtle is threatened both provincially and nationally, suggesting that they may be at risk of extinction in the future.

To prevent these turtles from becoming endangered, the Toronto Zoo got involved in a conservation project with the staff at Kejimikujik National Park in Nova Scotia. This involved receiving 56 hatchling Blanding's turtles from Nova Scotia in October. In the short-term the purpose of the project is to raise the baby turtles to a large enough size so that they can avoid being eaten by most predators before they are released back into the wild. The more long-term goal is to create a sustainable and healthy population of these turtles in Nova Scotia.

When the Blanding's turtles first arrived at the Zoo they were housed in a barn; however, due to poor insulation and the approaching cold weather, all of the tanks and turtles were moved to a building nearby where heat and light could easily be controlled. The new location made life easier for the staff and, of course, the turtles.

On Monday's I go with an employee from Adopt-A-Pond to feed the turtles a nutrient rich gel. On Wednesday's they are fed small frozen fish called smelt, and on Friday's they get fed worms. All of the food that we give them has to be cut up into pieces the size of rice so that it can easily be digested. The feedings are in

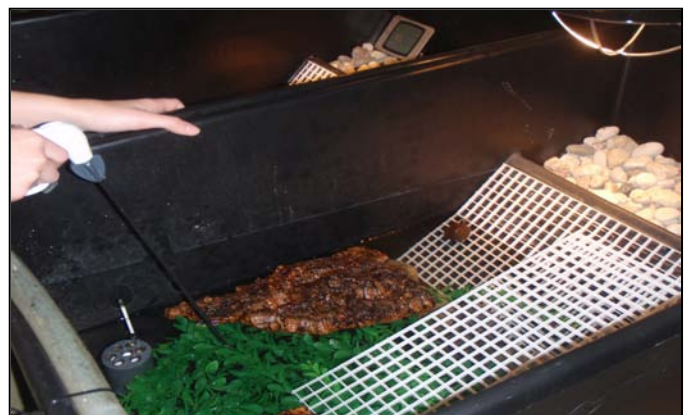
the morning so that the tanks can be cleaned later in the day after all food has been eaten.



A newly arrived hatchling exploring the rocks.  
Photo: AAP

To see if there is any progression in the size of the Blanding's turtles, they are measured and weighed once a week. We measure the length of their carapace (upper shell) using a set of callipers and we weigh them by placing them on a small digital scale. Weighing them allows us to monitor the individuals that have lost weight and to ensure they get enough food.

All the Blanding's turtles have been gaining weight over the past few weeks, which is important because they will be going into hibernation soon. Since they are indoors we are responsible for creating a winter environment. This will be done by slowly turning down the temperature of the water and by reducing the hours of "sun light". They will be in hibernation for about a month; at which point we will slowly turn the heat back up, making it seem like spring.



The temporary home for the turtles while at the Zoo  
Photo: AAP

# Puerto Rican Crested Toads: Care During Quarantine

*By Abi Nathan  
Co-op Student,*

*David and Mary Thompson Collegiate Institute*

My name is Abi 'Nathan and I am a grade 12 student that got the chance to do a unique 5-month co-op placement at the Toronto Zoo. Working at the Zoo is one of the most amazing experiences I've ever had! My only wish as I leave is that my co-op could have lasted longer! While at the Zoo I spent some of my time helping out in the Adopt-A-Pond office, but I spent the majority of it in the Animal Health Centre. This is where animals are kept in quarantine before they are transferred on or off site, and also where sick animals are cared for.

During my placement I worked with a variety of animals, one of my favourites being the Puerto Rican Crested Toads. These toads, native to Puerto Rico, were once thought to be extinct and are now listed as a threatened. The most common threat to the survival of the species is loss of habitat, primarily because of the filling or drainage of their ponds for construction, cultivation, and mosquito control. Another threat to their survival is the introduction of competitor and predator species such as marine toads, mongoose, and rats.

To combat these threats the Toronto Zoo captive breeds the toads, releasing the tadpoles into man-made ponds throughout Puerto Rico. The Zoo also provides public education and outreach programs to educate local people about the ongoing problems the species suffers from. These conservation efforts have had great success and have played a role in the toad's survival.

During my work with the toads they were in isolation in the quarantine unit. Animals are kept in quarantine to allow them to adjust to

their new conditions and to ensure that they do not spread any diseases. Working with these toads was an interesting experience. Like all animals each one of them has their own personality.



Mating Puerto Rican Crested Toads. Photo: Toronto Zoo

I had a day-to-day routine for their care which included cleaning and feeding. Their diet was set so that they were only fed every other day, but with a cleaning scheduled everyday they had a very well maintained enclosure, always with fresh water. Though most of the work is routine, in some cases animals need additional care either because they are ill or because they are part of an important conservation programme and require frequent monitoring.

Overall my placement was an eye-opening experience and gave me the chance to understand the efforts that are made at the zoo to keep the planet's rarest species alive.



*Description:* Puerto Rican Crested Toads are a medium sized toad. They range in colour from brown to yellow-brown and have black or brown patches on their body. They have an abundance of warts, numerous blackish spines, and a deep hollow between the eyes.  
Photo: ryanphotographic.com



# A Friendship is Formed with the Start of the Turtle Pals Program

By: Erin Nadeau, Adopt-A-Pond Programme

Several months ago the staff of Kejimikujik National Park contacted the Adopt-A-Pond Programme with an offer to care for a group of hatchling Blanding's turtles. Hatched in Nova Scotia, these turtles have spent the months from September until now in the care of the Toronto Zoo. In May, they will head back to Nova Scotia for release into the park where they originally came from. The "turtle sitting" of these animals seemed like a great opportunity to create a partnership program between students in Toronto and students in North Queens, Nova Scotia. The resulting program, termed Turtle Pals, pairs three groups of grade 5 and 6 students in Ontario with a partner class in Nova Scotia. The classes selected for the program come from St. Agatha's, Chine Drive, and Maple Ridge schools (all Eco Schools) and were chosen for their commitment to environmental stewardship and interest in wildlife conservation.

Throughout the year students in these classes will experience and discover the species at risk in their backyards and the issues that they face by focusing on turtle related activities and curriculum exercises that deal with conservation of turtles. Through in class presentations, field trips, and projects they will learn curriculum related concepts in a fun and interactive way. They will meet the 'at risk' Blanding's turtles that have travelled from Nova Scotia to their temporary home at the Toronto Zoo. They will learn all about the biology and ecology of these turtles and share these experiences with their Turtle Pals in North Queens, Nova Scotia.

The program kicked off on November 22<sup>nd</sup> with an event at the Toronto Zoo. Students spent the morning listening to a presentation from Adopt-A-Pond staff where they learned about the journey of the Blanding's turtles, their care at the Zoo, and the conservation challenges

that they face. Following this, the students had the chance to name 25 of the hatchling turtles. Some personal favourite names include: Beans, U-Jean, and Justin Bieber. After lunch students took to Zoo grounds to complete a turtle conservation scavenger hunt. They made their way through the Americas and Indomalaya pavilions on the hunt for answers to questions related to the various turtles on exhibit. By the time the day wrapped up all 75 students in attendance were excited to begin communication with their partner school and to begin their first classroom activity...learning about hibernation.

Over the next few months each class will be visited by a biologist from Adopt-A-Pond and will learn more about the biology and life stages of Blanding's turtles. During this time they will be keeping up to date with their partner schools in Nova Scotia and working on a special project to present at a Turtle Pals Workshop in May.



Justin Bieber, The most "famous" of the Turtle Pals turtles.  
Photo: AAP

## Adopt-A-Pond's 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Spring Toad Festival

Saturday April 30<sup>th</sup> and Sunday May 1<sup>st</sup>  
10am -4pm

Celebrate the arrival of Spring and the courtship of American Toads by spending some time at The America's Wetlands exhibit of the Toronto Zoo. Enjoy activities like face painting, toad tracking, and froggy fishing and say hello to Toady the mascot. It's sure to be a great family event. For more information please visit [www.torontozoo.ca/adoptapond](http://www.torontozoo.ca/adoptapond) or call Julia or Erin or 416-392-5999

See you there!

# A Great Escape For Grey Tree Frogs

By: Karen Wilson, Frogwatcher

Last Summer, my son, my granddaughter Ashleigh, and I could hear all this chirping going on and as we went looking for where the sound was coming from, we came across this little frog on the rail of our pool, which thank goodness, wasn't open yet. Upon further research, we discovered it was a Gray Tree Frog. We went to catch him to release him in a safer environment. My son captured him and we put him in a little carrier and were about to leave when we heard the chirping again. Well, turns out, we had TWO of them! We were able to catch the mate and we released them up the road in a much better environment. We could still hear the chirping in the distance long after the release. It was a very neat experience!



A Gray Treefrog Photo: Karen Wilson



Ashleigh and her Dad releasing the Gray Treefrogs  
Photo: Karen Wilson

# A Fantastic 2010 for Turtle Tally and Frogwatch

By: Erin Nadeau, Adopt-A-Pond Programme

A big thank you to everyone who took part in Ontario Turtle Tally and Frogwatch Ontario over the last year. Once again we had a huge number of submissions and had a busy season of entering data and communicating with our loyal volunteers. Here is a short summary from 2010!

The first reported frog call happened on March 9<sup>th</sup>, with the classic "peep, peep" of the Spring Peeper. Frog and toad reports continued to roll in all the way until August 31<sup>st</sup>, when yet another Spring Peeper call was reported. In total, 40 new Frogwatchers joined the program in 2010. With a grand total of 978 frog call reports for the year we can surely consider 2010 a success!

On the turtle side of things, this year's most frequently reported turtle species was the Painted Turtle, with a total of 1923 submitted sightings. This was followed close by Northern Map Turtles at 1447 and Snapping Turtles at 785. One of the most exciting elements of last year's data was the 166 turtles that were rescued off the road by Turtle Tally participants. Another highlight was reports of Ontario's endangered species, 6 wood turtle sightings and 34 spotted turtle sightings for the year. In total 881 people participated in the programme in 2010, and of these 388 were new joiners.

This season we got great feedback on the ads we placed in local papers and throughout cottager and naturalist newsletters. Lots of our new Turtle Talliers and Frogwatchers spotted these ads and become involved in the program. For Spring of 2011 we are working on making changes to the Turtle Tally submission page, making it easier to use and more informative. Hope to hear from all of you in 2011. Don't worry, Spring is just around the corner!



Snapping Turtle on a Ride, Tom and Grace Mals



Painted Turtle, Randy and Marg French



# Favourite Photos 2010

Gray Treefrog, Gary Bastin



Gray Treefrog, Joe Sinkowski



Grey Treefrog, Hilary Rankin



Snapping and Painted Turtles, Mark Williams



Blandings Turtle, Cathie Haskett





# Favourite Photos 2010



Snapping Turtle, Marty Albert



Spiny Softshell Turtle, Don Scallen



Blanding's Turtle, Lee Thomas



Painted Turtles, Beverly Burr



Snapping Turtle, Bert Monster



Map Turtle, Andrea Ferin



Stinkpot Turtle, Noreen Dertinger



# Ribbit's Review

## At Risk: The Turtle Survival Challenge Video Game



This fun and educational new game from Adopt-A-Pond gives players a chance to choose to live life as either a Blanding's or a Painted Turtle. Each level within the game corresponds to a season of the year, each with their own missions and challenges. As you move throughout the levels you must maintain your health levels by eating the proper prey and avoiding predators like raccoons. If you are successful in completing three missions you will unlock a fourth bonus mission and have the chance to search on land and in water for a mate. Each turtle species is surprisingly realistic and so are the many other animals and plants that the turtles encounter.

While the game is best suited for children ages 8-12 it can also be a lot of fun for older players. While it can teach you about the needs, threats, and behaviours of turtles it is also a lot of fun to play. To really challenge yourself try to eat as much food as possible to build up your score then compete against friends or yourself for the top score. Play now by visiting the Toronto Zoo Website at <http://www.torontozoo.ca/ExploretheZoo/GamesAndVideos.asp?pg=games>



Teachers! Curriculum based activities related to this game can be found online.

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**Amphibian Voice** is distributed to individuals 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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