



Amphibian Voice

Vol.13 No.2

ISSN 1705-8228

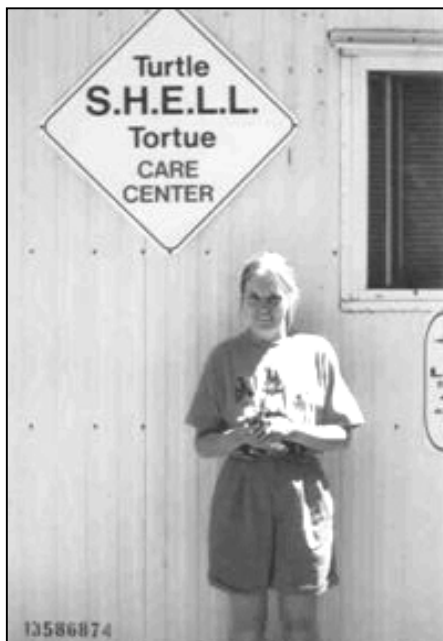
Summer 2003

Citizens Saving Turtles

Turtle S.H.E.L.L. Tortue: Helping Turtles Across the Road

By: Bill Bower

In the spring of 1997, Michele Andre-St. Cyr began keeping a diary of her observations of turtles crossing roads in Eastern Ontario. She recorded numbers of turtles seen crossing roads, locations, species killed, and species injured. She brought the injured turtles to local veterinarians specializing in reptiles to receive medical attention. Turtles were then cared for in the rehabilitation centre in her home. When the turtles had recovered from their injuries they were released at the location where they were found. Observations, recordings and care continued through the spring of 1999 at which



2003. The goals of the organisation include: provision of medical care and rehabilitation for indigenous turtle species; installation of turtle crossing signs along roadways; education of adults and children of the importance of protecting Ontario's turtles; preservation of turtle nesting areas, and involvement of governments in conserving wetlands for future generations.

Initially, it took approximately six months to design turtle crossing signs, while conforming to standard provincial highway traffic sign regulations. Local governments approved the sign design, which was a joint effort between TURTLE S.H.E.L.L. and Western Signs & Line Painting Ltd. In June 2000, the first

time she began concentrating her efforts on establishing TURTLE S.H.E.L.L. TORTUE (Safety

seventeen signs, bearing a pictograph of a turtle with tire marks across its shell, were installed in the United Counties of Prescott-Russell. The signs caught the attention of CBC Radio and TV and there were a number of very positive articles supporting this initiative in local newspapers. As of the spring 2003, 160 signs have been installed in the new City of Ottawa, Counties of Leeds Grenville, Lanark and Peterborough. Signs continue to be installed on roads in eastern

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Habitat Education Long Life). TURTLE S.H.E.L.L. was incorporated as a non-profit organization in April of 2001 and gained charitable status in January of

Ontario in areas of high turtle mortality. TURTLE S.H.E.L.L. works closely with local governments and various conservation groups to promote driver awareness and turtle conservation. The first TURTLE S.H.E.L.L. education booklet was written and printed in June 2001 in both official languages. A third edition is currently being completed along with an activity booklet for younger children. Our objective is to make the booklets available to educators and other community organisations in the hopes of inspiring an interest in turtles and an awareness of the critical need to maintain remaining wetlands and other suitable habitat for our indigenous turtle populations.

In September of 2001, TURTLE S.H.E.L.L. presented a turtle emergency surgery and rehabilitation workshop at the University of Guelph, Alfred Campus, for interested local veterinarians and club members. Kathy Michell, an expert on turtle injury and care from New York state, instructed those in attendance on how to carefully repair and rehabilitate injured turtles, a process that can take up to a year.

With the help of a generous grant from Friends of the Environment, Ottawa Chapter, the club was able to purchase and equip a turtle care centre in Rockland, Ontario in the fall of 2002. Our objective is to accept injured turtles, repair and care for them and return them to their original habitat at the earliest opportunity. The first 'patients' are now in our care and, unfortunately, more are expected to arrive. Although much has been accomplished, much more remains to be done. The Club would like to thank the many companies, government and private organisations and individuals who have provided support and donations for the organisation to achieve its goals.

For more information on TURTLE S.H.E.L.L. please visit our website at www.turtleshellortue.org or write to TURTLE S.H.E.L.L. TORTUE, 517 Wilson Road, Rockland, ON K4K 1K7.

Editor's Note: Adopt-A-Pond supports the efforts of turtle conservation groups across the province like Turtle S.H.E.L.L. Tortue, Community Environment Network, Kids 4 Turtles and the Kawartha Turtle Trauma Centre. Look on page 3 for the 2003 update on the Kawartha Turtle Trauma Centre.

Lily Pads & Cattails

Adopt-A-Pond Updates

By: Sarah Ingwersen

As turtles in Ontario face increased threats, it is important to keep a record of all turtle sightings in Ontario. Whether you encounter a turtle on the road, at your cottage, on a hike or in your own backyard, we want to know about it. The Ontario Turtle Tally is a new Adopt-A-Pond project. To receive a copy of our simple data form, contact Adopt-A-Pond and report your turtle sightings, by mail, phone or fax! Work on the on-line version is underway so next year it will be even easier to share you sightings. All data will be compiled and noteworthy sightings will be forwarded to the Natural Heritage Information Centre and turtle researchers in Ontario. If you are in the Kawartha area report your sightings to Kawartha Turtle Watch at www.trentu.ca/biology/turtlewatch

Five of our eight turtle species are listed as threatened or of special concern by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), the status of a sixth, the Blanding's turtle, is currently under review in Ontario. All Ontario turtles face grave threats, for example, Snapping turtles can be harvested for human consumption by any person with a valid fishing license! On each license a person can possess up to five live Snapping turtles at any one time. (Recently, a southern Ontario man was charged under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act for possessing 123 live Bullfrogs, 10 live Snapping turtles and 2 Midland painted turtles in his car. He was given a fine of \$10,000 and has been banned from fishing for three years. The animals were seized by police and were later returned to Lake Scugog). In 2003, the state of Maine, recognising the enormous number of threats to Snapping turtles, introduced a ban on Snapping turtle harvest.

Turtle populations in Ontario and abroad, are under enormous pressure due to habitat loss, road mortality, collection for the pet trade and collection for consumption. Help Ontario's turtles by reporting your sightings, creating wetland habitat and/or organising a community

stewardship group to install turtle crossing signs
(see page 6 for a step by step on how to do this!).

Kawartha Turtle Trauma Centre: 2003 Update

By: Dr. Kristy Hiltz

At the Kawartha Turtle Trauma Centre we are well into our second season, and are pleased to see that more and more people are bringing injured turtles in to us, although the number of turtles we have admitted has been almost overwhelming, considering our limitations in funding, manpower and space! Thankfully we have a very dedicated group of people who are working day (and night) to help our turtle friends.

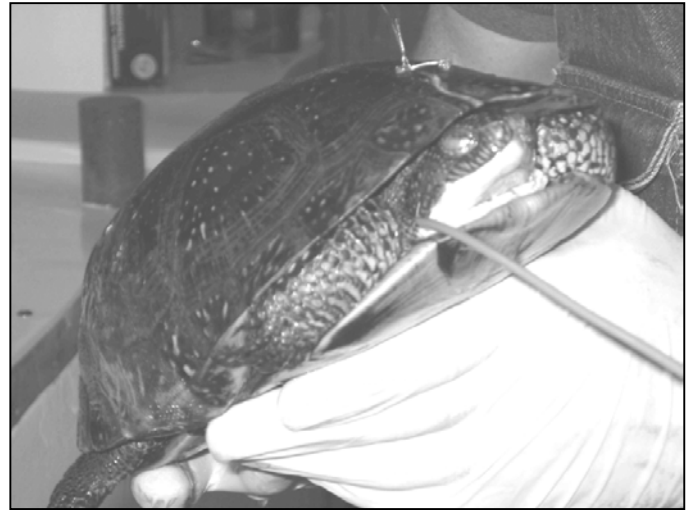
At present we have seen well over 50 turtles and are housing about 30. Many of these will remain with us over the winter as they recover from their injuries. We are also incubating hundreds of eggs, either passed by our patients or salvaged from turtles that have died. I can hardly wait to see the hatchlings as they emerge!



Dr. Hiltz examines a snapping turtle, don't try this at home!

Our greatest achievement this year has been saving the life of a badly injured female Blanding's turtle. Brought in by someone from the MNR, Emy was dehydrated and suffering from broken upper and lower jaws, fractures on her carapace, bridge and plastron, a broken pelvis, and badly damaged eyes. She also had pneumonia. Emy's lower jaw was wired, a short-term patch was placed on her fractured shell, and a feeding tube was placed. Needless to say, we had a very difficult time turning her around, but she has done very well. Emy is not yet eating on her own, but she has maintained her weight despite her injuries,

and has resumed many normal turtle behaviours such as basking. Emy is a favourite turtle among the volunteers at the Centre- we just can't help but admire her docile nature and incredible will to live!



Emy with her feeding tube

Emy is one of three Blanding's turtles we admitted this year. Another female was beyond help, with severe head injuries, but a male that arrived this weekend looks like he will pull through. Two Map turtles have also been brought to the Centre. These two species are at risk in Ontario, making the individuals we are working with very important indeed.

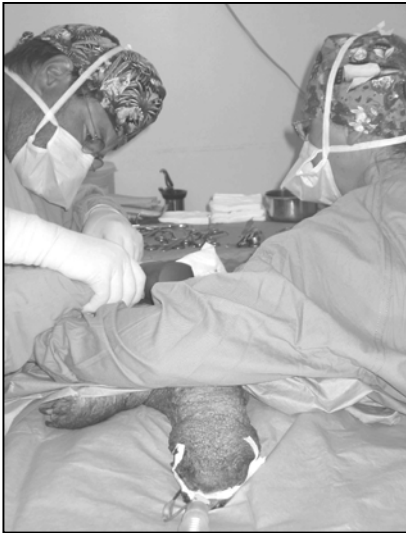


Map turtle at the Kawartha Turtle Trauma Centre

Lots of lovely painted turtles have come through the door, with many different injuries. We are starting to use different methods of repair, including wire, screws, and even dental braces! Most turtles we have seen have been hit by cars, but some have been injured by predators. One gravid (pregnant) turtle had been gnawed on by a dog before its owners came to her rescue. Our

male Blanding's has had one leg amputated above the knee, and a painted turtle and small snapping turtle have had feet bitten off. These are all old injuries, once again

Speedbump is a large male snapping turtle that is having a very difficult time, and we are concerned for his survival. He has multiple fractures on his carapace and bridge, and also has a broken leg. A veterinarian in Peterborough, Dr. Joe Muise, offered to pin Speedbump's leg and put bone plates on his shell. The surgery took over three hours to perform. Speedbump's recovery has been slow, and we decided to place a feeding tube in his neck to assist his recovery. Let's hope he pulls through!



Vets work for 3 hours to repair Speedbump's leg

We are very encouraged by the stories we are hearing more and more often about people doing things to help turtles. Organizations like Adopt-A-Pond and the KTTTC are working together to help our Ontario turtles, but more importantly, people across the province are realizing that only through the stewardship efforts of everyone together can we slow or stop the catastrophic decline of these marvelous reptiles. You can make a difference!

If you would like to see more of the work we are doing, visit our website at www.kawarthaturtle.org

Editor's Note: Unfortunately, as we were getting ready to go to press Speedbump succumbed to his injuries. The Kawartha Turtle Trauma Centre and all turtle rescue centres need funds to continue to help turtles. Your donations are appreciated and go directly to helping Ontario's turtles.

Ribbet's Review

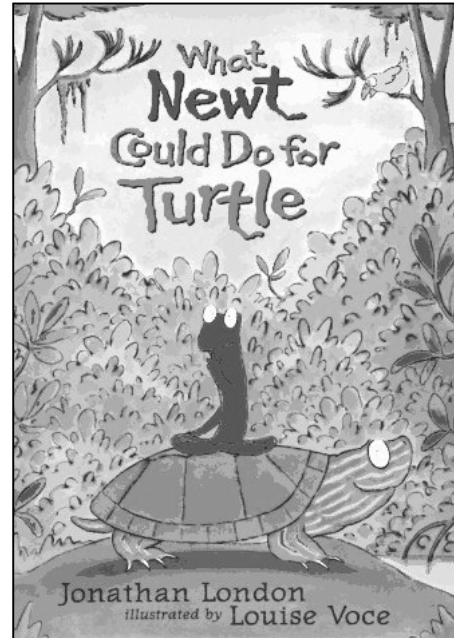
By Alison Ronson

What Newt Could Do For Turtle

By Jonathan London, illustrated by Louise Voce

Published by Candlewick Press, 1996,

ISBN: 0763605808



Turtle is Newt's greatest friend. Together they spend their summer in the swamp- and every day is filled with adventure and excitement. One day, when Newt is stuck in the mud, Turtle pulls him out. When Newt is almost eaten by snakes and alligators, it is Turtle who rescues him. At the end of all the adventures, grateful Newt is left asking himself, "What can I do for Turtle?" He longs to repay the kindnesses of his friend. Finally, the day comes- Turtle is stranded on his back and cannot turn over, but where is Newt? Find out how Newt saves the day, and cements the bond of friendship between himself and Turtle.

Written by Jonathan London and with fantastic illustrations by Louise Voce, "What Newt Could Do For Turtle", while intended for children aged 3-7, is a great story for everyone, young and old, and will enchant both amphibian lovers and reptile fanatics alike. Kids will love the vibrant and cute pictures of Turtle and Newt, and will

learn about friendship and caring and the importance of saying thanks.

Setting Up Turtle Crossing Signs in Your Community:

A step by step guide from the members of the Community Environment Network in Bancroft

By Daniel Boileau

Want to help protect migrating turtles in your community? Here are a few helpful tips to get your turtle sign project on the road!

1. MAKE NEW FRIENDS

Find a local group that is committed to environmental matters in your area. A naturalist club, cottage associations, girl guides, boy scouts, etc. Anyone who will listen to your concerns and lend a helping hand should be enlisted in your campaign.



Midland painted turtle Photo by: Judith Ingwersen

2. LOCATE THE TURTLES

Set up a community wildlife watch by placing a notice in the local paper. Ask people to inform you of roadways where turtles are often spotted. Determine which roads contribute to turtle deaths and prioritize them. Do this to ensure that they receive quick attention when you're ready to go.

3. START NETWORKING

With priorities set, find out what you'll need to help this project along. Signs, advertising, helping hands, letter writers and funding will all be

necessary to make this project work. Talk to people who can provide these things. Try your local Ministry of Natural Resources office, a Stewardship Council, Ontario Parks, municipal officials, schools and local associations. Someone out there will have an interest in helping you. Try Adopt-A-Pond! (aap@torontozoo.ca)

4. CREATE A BUDGET

Once you've figured out everything you will need, prepare a budget listing all expenses which will be required to get signs in the ground.

5. SEEK APPROVALS

Determine ownership of the roads which have been selected for signs. Are they a municipal responsibility or provincial. Who is in charge of these roads? Write letters listing all of your supporters. Set up meetings with councils and roads department superintendents. Make your case as to why they should offer their support - be it moral and/or financial. Make it as easy for them as possible. Government officials are busy and don't want extra work. However if someone appears with a good idea, a budget and a plan, they will likely be more receptive of your proposal.

6. BE PERSISTENT

While municipal officials are easy to target for local roads, you will have to work through many civil servants in order to find support for the provincial highway system. Here are a few contacts to get you started: Ministry of Transportation, Regional Traffic Section, P.O. Bag 4000, Kingston, Ontario, K7L 5A3. Also try this office: Ministry of Transportation, 301 St. Paul St., St. Catharines, Ontario, L2R 7R4. Send to the attention of Mr. Harold Doyle. Good luck.

7. START PASSING THE HAT

Raise money any way you can. Find sponsors and donors. If someone turns you down for financial donations - try to encourage them to help in some other way.

With the funds in place, support from local groups, and the signs in hand, you will be ready to erect your signs in accordance with approvals you've received from local officials. You may even ask for their help, just to ensure that the signs are properly placed and secure from traffic and would-be thieves.

Call'um of the Wild

Rescuing turtles in war-torn Bosnia

By Wes von Papineäu,

Staff officer, National Defence Headquarters, Ottawa

One of the advantages of participating in a peacekeeping activity is the opportunity to observe wildlife from exotic countries in their (almost) natural habitat. In an Army career, one might have the chance to follow fire salamanders to their breeding streams in Croatia, shake snakes out of a sleeping bag in Afghanistan, chase cane toads in Hawaii and pass by alligators sunning themselves in a headquarters parking lot in Tampa, Florida.

In the fall of 1991, the NATO peacekeeping base in Banja Luka, Bosnia was engaged in a massive engineering effort to put in new security fencing and a helicopter-landing pad. The result of this was that, from time to time, a bulldozer would excavate a turtle trying to burrow in for winter in the soft mud of the small creek that ran through the camp. One lucky individual was turned over by the engineers to the Dutch nurses working at the base hospital ... who subsequently built 'Stoney the turtle' a small home next to their living trailers.



Peacekeepers watch over a rescued turtle

As the nurses left the camp to return home, they turned 'Stoney' over to me; the Canadian 'snake officer' who was known to wander the camp staring intently at the variety of snakes and 'crawling things' that had found their way into the camp (and sometimes into people's sleeping

quarters). Since I was now responsible for the comfort of my own small hard-shelled 'refugee', I had to turn my office into a small turtle sanctuary ... complete with a small fence, pan of water, basking lamp and the very best in tidbits from the camp kitchen.

As the word spread of the 'turtle farm', more and more turtles (and tortoises) began to be dropped off on my front step. Some were fellow victims of losing their habitat to local engineering initiatives, others were caught up in the good hearted but miss-guided humanitarian efforts of kind souls who, finding a turtle crossing a road, figured that it was 'lost' and in need of a good home somewhere safe!

In the spring, most of the turtles and tortoises were



European pond turtle

taken back to suitable areas and released, but alas, 'Stoney' the European pond turtle and another female of the same species, were still with me. Their home had been bulldozed dry and there appeared to be no area close by suitable to be their new home.

A phone call back to Canada to Mike Rankin (a herpetology associate with the Canadian Museum of Nature) resulted in him contacting Bob Johnson, Curator of Amphibians and Reptiles at the Toronto Zoo. Bob then coordinated a series of government departments to explore the possibility of having the two now homeless turtles moved to Canada. Weeks of explorations, negotiation and paper work resulted in permits being issued to bring the two across, and the Toronto Zoo made arrangements to have the turtles met at the airport where they still had to pass customs and health

procedures (but not immigration). On being given the 'all clear', the turtles were then moved quickly to the Toronto Zoo where they were quarantined, medically checked and put on the very best of turtle diets. After a short stay in the big city, the two were subsequently moved to a permanent home with the Paddock Zoo in Atascadero, California.

My experience in this peacekeeping mission demonstrated that regardless of where you are in the world, there are environmental sensitivities that you must be aware of. There are always very real opportunities to do something good for some of the local wildlife, and prove that environmental awareness is a worldwide concern, regardless of your nationality or current employment.

Editor's Note: The turtles were obtained by the California zoo to demonstrate the impacts of war on wildlife and we were pleased to bring a Canadian perspective to this message. Toronto Zoo, along with all of Canada very much respects the efforts of Wes von Papineau and our armed forces demonstrating such concern for wildlife while under such trying circumstances.

Life as a 'Turtler' at Algonquin Park's Wildlife Research Station

By Sara Boivin-Chabot, Jenny Kellar and Phung Tran

In the early 1970s, at the Wildlife Research Station located in Algonquin Park, an ambitious turtle project began. Since that very auspicious year, a steady stream of researchers, supervised by Dr. Ron J. Brooks of the University of Guelph, have had a hand in contributing to a huge database on the turtles in and around the park. This long-term study now includes over 500 Painted turtles (*Chrysemis picta*), 100 Snapping turtles (*Chelydra serpentina serpentina*), 150 Wood turtles (*Clemmys insculpta*) and a few Blanding's turtles (*Emys blandingii*). These amazing creatures are caught every year by a carefully selected team of researchers who collect information for this ongoing study focusing on population ecology, and individual growth and reproduction.

The turtle research season starts off in late April as the turtles begin to emerge from the mud at the

bottom of the pond or the lake, where they spent the long winter. At this time turtles bask on floating logs and bog mats, allowing these ectotherms to soak up the sun's energy to bring their body temperatures to optimum levels. The turtle team, a.k.a. the "Turtlers", catch turtles using a net while paddling around the pond in a canoe. The turtles that are caught are brought to the research lab at the station where they are identified, measured and checked for wounds or deformities. A turtle is identified by a small silver tag, which can be found on the edge of their carapace (placed there by previous Turtlers), or by specific and unique characteristics that were noted in previous years. New turtles are also caught every year and are inaugurated into the study by being tagged with a new identification number. Once the researchers are finished with the tagging/measurement process, their number is painted on their carapace for easy identification during the nesting season (the paint disappears with their scutes, which are shed every year). The turtles are then released back to the pond in which they were caught so that they can return to their favourite log or bog mat to continue basking!



Numbered study turtles return to the water in Algonquin Park

The research continues into June and July when the females are nesting. Fighting through the wall of blackflies and mosquitoes, the researchers record the females that are old enough to lay eggs and watch for them to start digging. After a turtle has laid her clutch, the eggs are carefully dug up and taken back to the lab for measurements. Each turtle has her own nest database, so that we can compare the conditions in which she laid, the state of her eggs

as she grows older and what made her choose
the spot to lay her eggs. The eggs are then

carefully returned back to their original nest in less than 12 hours.

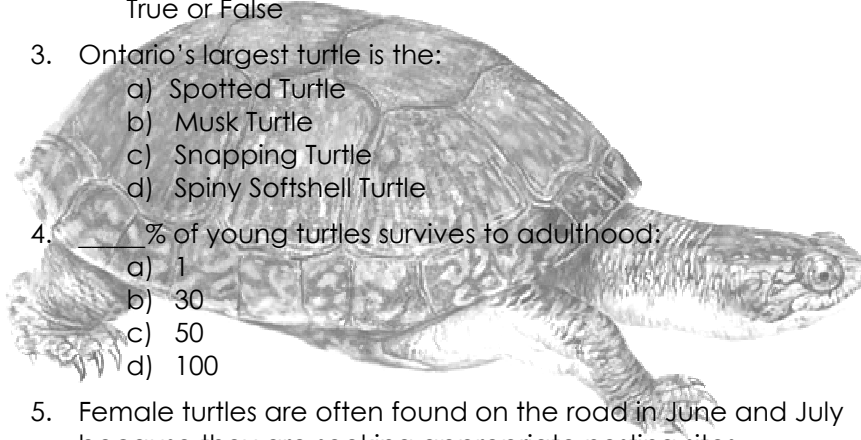
Summer 2003

So why does all of this matter? Why has this study lasted almost 30 years and why will it continue? Each Turtler could tell you a tale of their participation in the project, but it goes beyond individual interest. The conservation of turtle species in Ontario, Canada and the world needs as much information as possible in order to make responsible decisions on behalf of turtles. The more we understand, the more equipped we are to help conserve our natural heritage.

Hey, Kids! Try Our Turtle Quiz ...

A TURTLE-RIFIC QUIZ

1. There are _____ species of turtles native to Ontario.
a) 4
b) 0
c) 8
d) 12
2. The carapace is the upper part of a turtle's shell.
True or False
3. Ontario's largest turtle is the:
a) Spotted Turtle
b) Musk Turtle
c) Snapping Turtle
d) Spiny Softshell Turtle
4. _____% of young turtles survives to adulthood:
a) 1
b) 30
c) 50
d) 100
5. Female turtles are often found on the road in June and July because they are seeking appropriate nesting sites.
True or False
6. The _____ is NOT a native to Ontario.
a) Common Snapping Turtle
b) Red Eared Slider
c) Blanding's Turtle
d) Western Painted Turtle
7. A turtle is a:
a) mammal
b) amphibian
c) fish
d) reptile
8. You can help turtles in Ontario by:
a) organizing a community group to install turtle crossing signs
b) encouraging a local school to use Adopt-A-Pond's Turtle Resources
c) participating in Adopt-A-Pond's Ontario Turtle Tally
d) all of the above!



Answers: 1. c; 2. True; 3. c; 4. a; 5. True; 6. b; 7. d; 8. d

Amphibian Voice 8

Volume 13, 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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Support for the Adopt-A-Pond Programme:

Toronto Zoo Foundation

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!

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