

Amphibian Voice



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Turtles, turtles, turtles!

Kids 4 Turtles: Kids Project or Serious Environmental Issue?

By: Kristy Hiltz*

Kids Project or Serious Environmental Issue? Actually Kids 4 Turtles is both! Kids 4 Turtles started two years ago at Rollin' Acres independent school near Peterborough. The children at Rollin' Acres noticed that turtles were being run over by vehicles as they crossed the road near their school. The children, age 4-10, made their own signs to help inform motorists of the presence of turtles on the road, but they were vandalized. The children decided it was time to get more permanent signs erected. And so it began. The children started writing letters to local merchants to make donations to raffles, they approached town councils, they talked their parents into placing donation jars in their businesses. Brianna Cheyne, 7, Jordan, 8, and Adam, 5 convinced their stepfather, Wendell Wilson to donate \$1 of the cost of an oil change at his garage to the turtle crossing fund. The kids also signed up sponsors for their hike a-thons. In the end the kids managed to raise over \$4,000 for turtle crossing signs.



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While raising money for turtle crossing signs was fun to do, the children's efforts gave a voice to a serious environmental issue – the worldwide catastrophic population decline of most of the world's species of turtles. Some species are already extinct, and many more are endangered. Areas where turtles are especially at risk include Asia, North America and in the oceans around the world. Loss of habitat, the pet trade, air and water pollution, and roadkill are all significant problems. In North America some experts feel that the most significant cause of turtle mortality is being hit by a motor vehicle. Female turtles are the most likely victims as they cross roads to reach nesting sites. Female turtles return to the same nesting site year after year.

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Turtles have a unique life history which make them especially susceptible to population decline. They are a long-lived species that take many years to reach maturity. Once they reach breeding age, females are capable of reproducing for most of their adult lives. In order to sustain the turtle population, the females need to reproduce frequently over their life span. Very few eggs hatch as a result of predation (as raccoon populations increase in urban areas the threat of predation increases) and even fewer hatchlings survive to maturity. Researchers have found that as few as one of out of every 100 hatchlings survive to reach adulthood!



Turtles occupy a unique niche in the ecosystem, as they are both terrestrial and aquatic. They are opportunistic feeders, eating any food available to them. Small turtles may be herbivorous, eating plants, or they may also eat insects. Large snapping turtles are heavy feeders on aquatic vegetation and carrion, and therefore are very beneficial to our recreational waters. Healthy turtle populations will reduce the amount of vegetation in the lakes and reduce carrion in the water and on the shore. This means cleaner beaches! If carrion is left to rot in the water it will increase bacterial counts and deplete oxygen, contributing to algae blooms. Kids 4 Turtles call turtles, the garbage collectors of lakes and wetlands.

Kids 4 Turtles has successfully obtained the approval of municipal politicians to erect the signs. Each sign, installed, costs \$100. So far, they have selected 14 locations to erect the signs.

Kids 4 Turtles is a fun project that addresses a serious environmental concern. The children of Rollin' Acres have proved that with a little persistence and some creativity it is possible to help turtles!



SLOW AND STEADY: Students of Rollin' Acres school near Millbrook have raised the money to buy Turtle Crossing signs that they will place near their school to warn drivers against running over snapping and Midland painted turtles crossing the road to lay eggs.

Students race to save turtles

Sign campaign aimed at speeding motorists

By Karen Hicks
MILLBROOK — A group of children — some as young as 5 — are so upset by the sight of turtles killed by cars on the road near their school that they are spearheading a Peterborough, Canada-wide campaign to protect them.
For a couple of weeks in May, female snapping and Midland painted turtles come out of the wetlands at Foster Creek and cross the road to lay eggs.

Kids talk hardened politicians into shelling out for turtles

County approves signs alerting drivers to watch for threatened species

By Karen Hicks
PETERBOROUGH — A group of children has convinced a group of politicians to approve a plan to buy signs to warn drivers to watch for snapping and Midland painted turtles crossing the road to lay eggs.



ANIMAL PROTECTORS: Kids 4 Turtles members advise on snapping turtle held by Mark Hamilton and with Peterborough County Council chairman (left).

The children have raised \$1,000 through a series of events to buy the signs. The signs will be placed at Foster Creek and other locations where turtles cross the road to lay eggs. The children are also planning to hold a "Turtle Day" at their school in May. The children are also planning to hold a "Turtle Day" at their school in May. The children are also planning to hold a "Turtle Day" at their school in May. The children are also planning to hold a "Turtle Day" at their school in May.

***Editor's Note**

Dr. Kristy Hiltz is a veterinarian in Peterborough, Ontario. She and Jan Rowland, owner and teacher of Rollin' Acres Independent School, assisted the children in their campaign to save turtles.

Karen Hicks, a freelance writer and photographer in Peterborough, Ontario, wrote the above articles, which appeared in the Toronto Star.

TURTLE TRIVIA

1. There are 9 turtle species in Ontario. (Spotted Turtle, Snapping Turtle, Wood Turtle, Map Turtle, Blanding's Turtle, Musk Turtle, Midland Painted Turtle, Western Painted Turtle and Eastern Spiny Softshell Turtle.
2. Females often use gravel on road shoulders for nesting.
3. Delayed onset of sexual maturity—some Snapping Turtle females don't breed until they are between 13 and 18 years of age!
4. Turtles do not exhibit a compensatory response to adult mortality by increasing reproductive output.
5. Up to 30% of turtles on the road are killed by motor vehicles.



It isn't fair for the people who live in
 Ontario that the turtles are in trouble.
 Please be aware of them. Please
 watch out for all animals so that
 they do not become endangered.
 That would be very sad and awful.
 BY ALex McRAE
 age 5

The Kids 4 Turtles children wrote numerous letters, including letters to town council and requests for raffle donations. The grand prize for the raffle was a DVD player from Canadian Tire in Peterborough.

Here are some examples of their work!

SAVE THE TURTLES
 KIDS 4 TURTLES LUCKY DRAW
 100% OF EARTH DAY APRIL 22, 2001
 buy turtle tickets sales will go directly to
 Grand Prize DVD Player (\$299) From
 Canadian Tire.
 Grand prize Huge Franklin the turtle
 (\$275) From titles book store
 ③ \$125 cash From Br.T. trading (At Food Warehouse)
 ④ sleeping bag From Wild Rock outfitters (\$100)
 ⑤ \$100 cash From Kelly's Fuel.
 ⑥ Radio-controlled Volvo From Bert Angevaere
 Volvo Resort
 ⑦ Plane ride for two from Elmhurst's
 - more on reverse side - LCT #200012

5 Crayola craft-kits From Minite
 telephone and other gifts
 From Maxicom
 hair cut From ALBAN. At Locks.
 model ford truck From holiday
 ford
 \$3000 gift certificate from
 Stickling Bakery.
 two \$10 gift certificates
 From the toy Shop.
 \$15 gift certificate from
 Great Canadian Bagel
 Two franklin books from
 Kipsican Press.
 Two puzzles from Fobish toys.
 Chocolates from the Murty
 chocolatier
 two t-shirts from Wild Rock
 Outfitters

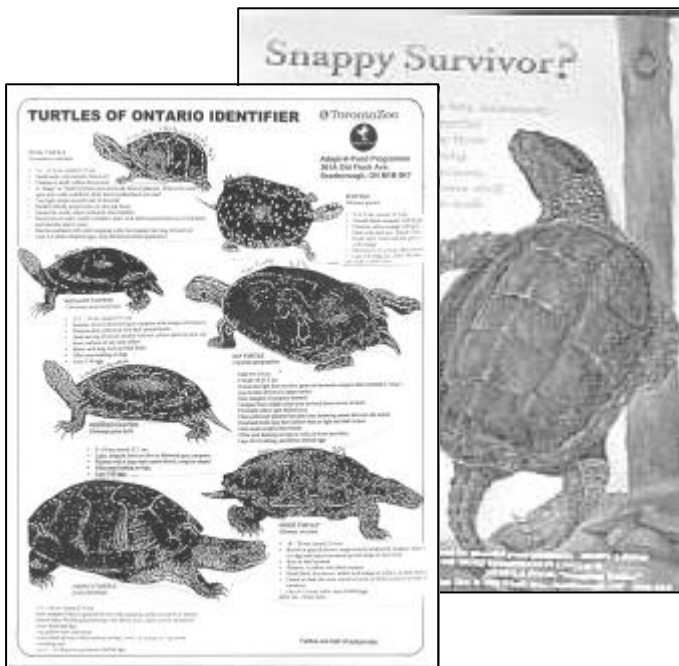
Turtles are a part of
 nature. If we do not
 watch out for them
 then they will become
 extinct.
 Kate Taylor
 age 6

Lily Pads and Cattails

Adopt-A-Pond Programme Updates

By: Sarah Ingwersen

The Adopt-A-Pond Programme is introducing a new poster and identifier guide for the turtles of Ontario. These new resource materials will be the same style as the "Amphibians of Ontario" poster and identifier guide. We hope that you, as Adopt-A-Pond participants, will find them useful.



The poster and identifier guide titled "Turtles of Ontario" features Ontario's nine species of turtles with descriptions and photo-realism paintings. These new resources will join our "Snappy Survivor" poster as part of the educational resources for turtle conservation. A new [Turtle Curriculum Resource](#) is under development and will be available by Fall 2002.

The Adopt-A-Pond Programme wishes to acknowledge Wally Edwards for his outstanding paintings, Chris Bauer for his design expertise, and Candy Jones and Fabiola Novales for their various contributions to the effort. We also wish to thank Toronto Parks and Recreation and the Sydenham Foundation for their support of this project.

To receive a copy of the new poster and/or identifier write or e-mail The Adopt-A-Pond Programme.

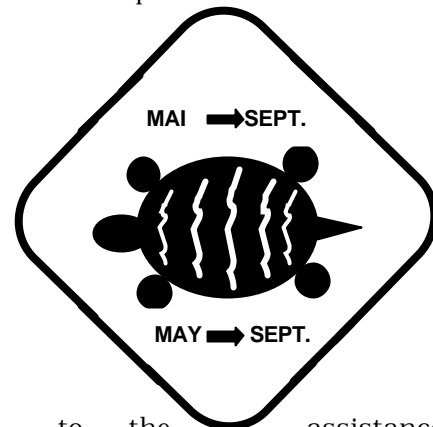
Turtle Crossing:

Road Signs Raise Awareness in Bancroft

by Daniel Boileau

Crossing roads in the Bancroft area will soon be safer for snapping turtles and other wildlife thanks to the Community Environmental Network (CEN). Noticing an alarming increase in the number of squashed turtles on roads last summer, the group flew into action by asking residents to alert them of areas where turtle mortality was especially high. Eleven roads were identified as places where turtles crossed in search of favorite nesting sites. Man-made, soft shoulders on roads abutting wetlands are the leading culprit in the demise of turtles in search of prime nesting sites.

Next spring CEN will erect four signs which have been approved for municipal roads. Signs slated for highway use have yet to be approved as the Ministry of Transportation does not have a policy to protect wildlife. MTO is primarily concerned with driver safety on roads. CEN is now focusing its attention on having the remaining seven sites approved and will pursue the MTO to review their policies.



Thanks to the assistance of local residents, municipalities and donations from the Toronto Zoo, Ontario Parks and the Bancroft Area Stewardship Council for making the snapping turtle's life a little easier. Other municipalities are starting to take notice too. The Ottawa area has over 50 such signs to help protect turtles.

Hopefully one day, all roads and highways throughout eastern Ontario will use these signs. One nesting snapper can carry a clutch of 20 to 30 eggs. By saving one turtle, we increase the survival odds for the next generation. In a world of speeding cars, disappearing wetlands and increasing pollution, creating public awareness on roads is the least we can do for our 150 million year old reptile friends.

Call'um of the Wild

My Backyard Pond

*By: Andrew Flanagan, age 11**

The summer of 2000 I spent one week at the Pinery Provincial Park where I met a naturalist named Brad. He taught me a lot about reptiles, amphibians and pond life.

When I got home I went straight to the computer and checked out a website Brad talked about, www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond. At this website I found lots of information on frogs and snakes. There are also quizzes that test your knowledge on this topic. I learned all of the names of the frogs and snakes that live in Ontario and all the frog calls.

One evening when I was getting ready for bed something popped into my head, "we have a big yard, a pool liner and I could make my own pond". So the next morning I asked my Mom if I could build a pond, it was OK with her so I walked around our side lot which has two pine trees, a small garden, beside a seven acre field. I chose the area beside the pine trees since it would get the morning sun and afternoon shade and be a private, quiet area.

Over three days I dug an area approximately 8' x 4' which was a little more difficult than I thought to dig by hand. Of course my three-year-old sister had to help dig. Soon it was a family project. My neighbour had an old pool liner that I thought could line the hole, which it did at least for a while. My Mom helped me get some water iris plants and floating hearts. I thought great my pond is done, well it was but, the water leaked out and not one creature came near it. Fall came and my pond filled with leaves, later snow filled the pots the plants were in and the pool liner cracked.

It was Christmas time and all I really wanted was a new pond liner. To my surprise there it was Christmas morning along with a long-handed net, big plastic frog and a small frog spike.

The first signs of spring I began to take the old pond liner out and then I had to make a few adjustments in the depth and width. At this point my Dad got involved because the ground had to be level and shaped to fit the liner. The water iris plants survived the winter and we bought some

floating hearts, lily pads and a snail. I added two logs and rocks around my pond.

This summer there have been seven frogs in the pond, three Green Frogs and four Leopard Frogs. One large American Toad was around for about two weeks and I have seen two Garter Snakes.

I like to sit by my pond and watch the frogs. I've noticed that it seems the frogs are getting used to me since they don't hop away when I move around the pond area. I like to catch crickets and feed the frogs.



I really find amphibians interesting to watch so I decided to make a chart showing the type, gender and size of each new frog that comes to the pond. This has been a good experience for me and has helped me to educate my friends and many others in our neighbourhood. Friends call me the "Frog Expert" because I know their names, sounds and about their bodies.

This fall I will have to move the frogs to a bigger

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and deeper pond since mine is only about three feet deep and they wouldn't survive the winter. I'm glad to have the opportunity to study these amazing creatures for the past few months.

I would like to thank Brad for taking the time to share the information on pond life with me, over the past year it has become a great hobby for me.

***Editor's Note**

Andrew's pond has inspired both his family and his community. Neighbours come to visit to find out "the latest news" about Andrew's pond. Even Andrew's sister, Lauren, has a special contribution to the pond. Lauren collects "special" rocks and puts them in "special" spots around the pond! Andrew has been working on his pond for two years and he has more plans for next year, too. For Christmas he has asked for a pump for the pond to reduce the algae blooms. Thank you, Andrew, for your inspiring work and fabulous story!

Ribbet's Review

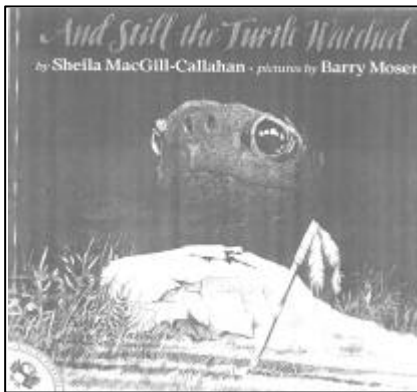
By Sarah Ingwersen

And Still the Turtle Watched

By Sheila MacGill-Callahan, Pictures by Barry Moser

Puffin Books

Published by the Penguin Group
1991



And Still the Turtle Watched is a story of gradual environmental degradation as witnessed by a Native American stone carving of a turtle.

This touching tale, accompanied by beautiful illustrations, chronicles the joys, pains and fears of the turtle as he watches over the land through generations.

This is a book that both children and adults can enjoy. It is a book that will teach of the importance of care and respect for our cultural and natural heritage.

Society for Ecological Restoration and the Adopt-A-Pond Programme

By Sarah Ingwersen

On October 13, 2001, members from the Society for Ecological Restoration (SER) Ontario and Adopt-A-Pond met to discuss wetland construction and restoration. SER Ontario is part of an international organization committed to the ecologically sensitive repair and management of ecosystems.



Adopt-A-Pond is involved in wetland and pond conservation and creation throughout Ontario. Adopt-A-Pond has an opportunity to construct three experimental vernal pools on-site. SER participants provided their valuable advice for the construction of these areas.

The day focused on strategies for the construction and restoration of wetlands for two projects: the Puerto Rican Crested Toad breeding ponds project and ephemeral wetlands creation in Ontario. The agenda included a tour of the wetland restoration sites at the Zoo, information on the Adopt-A-Pond Wetland Conservation Programme and an examination of pool construction techniques (especially vernal pools) and the unique challenges of seaside Puerto Rico. The role of participants was to provide feedback in terms of process, design and construction.

This contact was triggered by a similar collaboration effort with SER and the American Zoo and Aquarium Association to establish a framework for cooperation for the restoration of native habitats, using appropriate tools of outreach and education.

This is a unique and productive opportunity to collaborate to provide ideas and methods regarding habitat rehabilitation for an endangered toad and species that depend on vernal/ephemeral pools. THANK YOU SER – Ontario!

A Cold Snap: Snapping Turtles In The Rouge Valley

By: Sarah Ingwersen



Falling temperatures, short days, snow and ice define winter. The winter months have varying effects on humans; some are driven inside to curl up with a good book and a cup of tea, while others grab their skis, augers or snowshoes and head out into the cold. Whatever way we choose to survive the winter months, amphibians and reptiles are surviving it in their own unique way too. Buried beneath the snow and ice, deep in the mud, they wait out the winter.



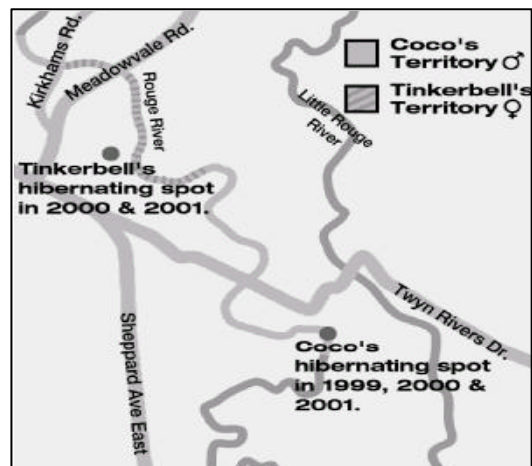
Our interest in overwintering sites began in 1989 with the discovery of several turtles buried in a Rouge Valley wetland. Since 1999, the Adopt-A-Pond Programme has been using radio telemetry equipment to track and study snapping turtles in the Rouge Park. This equipment allows Adopt-A-Pond staff to determine snapping turtle movements and habitat use, including the areas they use for hibernation.

In the summer of 1999, the first snapping turtle for the study was found. This turtle, a male, is referred to as "Coco", as he was found amongst coconut shells in the Rouge River. In 2000, three more turtles were added to the study, "Storm" (a male, found after a big thunderstorm), "Rocky" (another male, found battling Storm in Storm's territory) and "Tinkerbelle" (a female, found next to Coco).

According to our observations each male in our study group has its own defined territory. The female, Tinkerbelle, has been found in the territories of two separate males (Coco and Storm).

One of the most exciting discoveries of this study has been to locate the areas that snapping turtles select to overwinter. All four of our study animals have returned not only to the same wetland where they were last year, but also to the EXACT same spot within the wetland! Tinkerbelle, Storm and Rocky are in small river scars adjacent to their section of river. These small wetlands are comprised of down woody debris, mud and a wide variety of vegetation, and they are extremely important to snapping turtle populations. Coco overwinters in the Rouge River buried deep into the muddy bank.

Snapping turtles are active between mid April and



early September. According to our observations, snapping turtles begin to emerge from their overwintering sites in the spring when the surrounding temperature of mud or water reaches 15°C. Likewise, in the fall, when water temperatures return to 15°C the turtles return to their overwintering sites, travelling overland and often climbing over large obstacles to reach their destination.

Snapping turtles are one of Ontario's most misunderstood animals. Using radio telemetry to track the movements of snapping turtles in the Rouge Park will help us to better understand these secretive creatures.

The Adopt-A-Pond programme, as part of Pond Guardians, in the coming months will introduce new educational resources and opportunities to become involved with turtle conservation. In the future we plan to add other turtle species to this expanding project.

Whether you choose to overwinter with a cup of tea or whether you decide to head out into the cold, think of the snapping turtles nestled deep in the mud in their special spots waiting for spring to arrive.

This project is generously funded by the Rouge Park Natural and Cultural Heritage Program.

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Amphibian Voice is a student/teacher and community newsletter, distributed to schools and communities participating in the Adopt-A-Pond programme, to assist with their efforts to conserve amphibians and wetland habitats.

Send in your stories, drawings and photographs to the address below and we will "hoppily" include them in future issues.

Editors:

Sarah Ingwersen
Adopt-A-Pond Coordinator

Bob Johnson
Curator of Reptiles and
Amphibians

Contributors:

Sarah Ingwersen
Kristy Hiltz
Andrew Flanagan
Daniel Boileau

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Adopt-A-Pond is a non-profit wetlands 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 out to "Toronto Zoo" and send to the following address. Thank you!

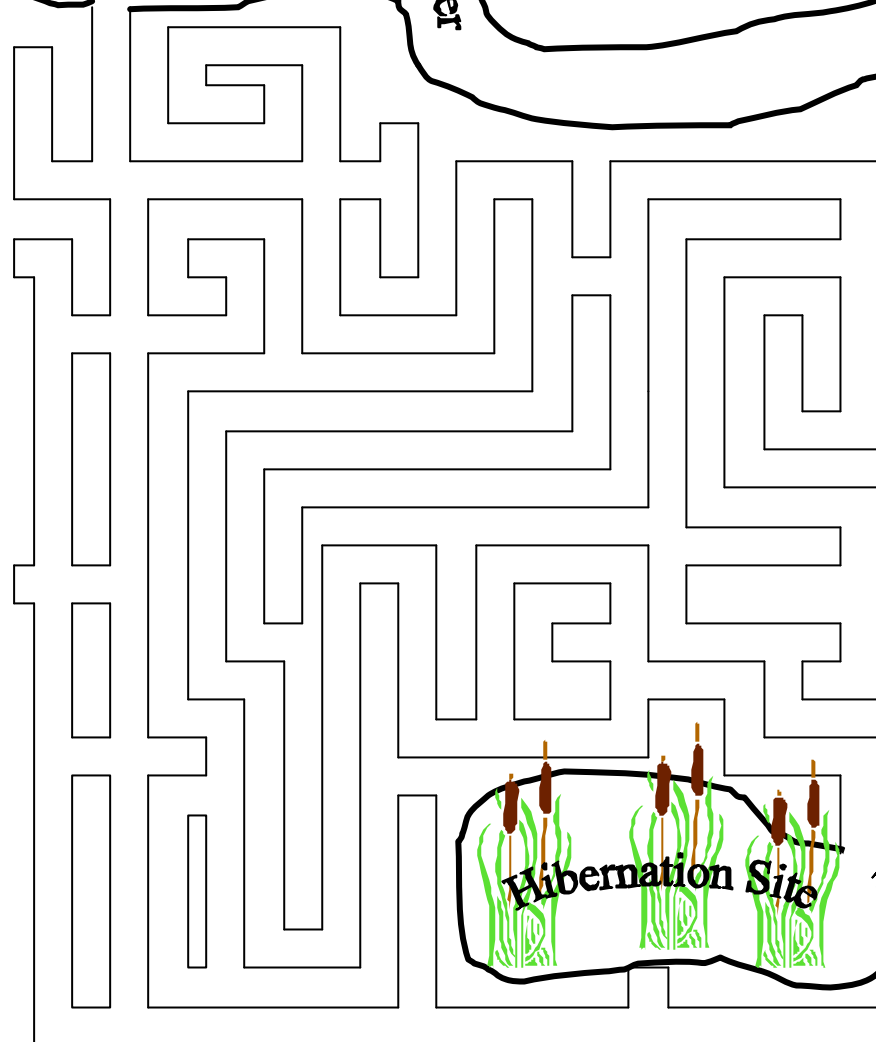
Adopt-A-Pond
Toronto Zoo
361A Old Finch Ave.
Scarborough, ON
M1B 5K7
Fax: (416) 392-4979
aap@torontozoo.com



Printed on 100% recycled paper,
using vegetable based ink!

Can you help Rocky find his hibernating site?

Rouge River



KAWARTHA TURTLE WATCH

Kawartha Turtle Watch is an initiative to encourage residents of the Kawartha Lakes region to report turtles sightings to a coordinated databank. Kawartha Lakes region residents can watch for turtles in lakes, ponds and rivers any time from May to October. Keep notes of your observations, the following information is worth recording: species and numbers of turtles, date and time, specific location, weather, habitat, activity, and condition of animal.

There is still much to be learned about turtle biology. The more we know about their environmental needs, the more we will be able to interpret changes in their abundance and distribution. For more information on this exciting opportunity check out their website: www.trentu.ca/biology/turtlewatch or e-mail them at turtlewatch@trentu.ca!