

A turtle with a dark, patterned shell and yellowish head is swimming in water. The water is surrounded by green foliage and purple flowers. The text "Turtles on your Property" is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# Turtles on your Property

what to know and do



toronto  
**ZOO**

**Adopt A Pond Wetland Conservation Programme, Toronto Zoo. 2011.  
Turtles on your Property - what to know and do. Prepared for  
landowners of wetland turtle habitat in Ontario.**

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# Turtles on your Property

what to know and do

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# Species at Risk



Species at risk (SAR) are plants and animals that are in trouble and need our help. They are in danger of disappearing from Ontario, Canada, or the entire planet. There are over 190 in Ontario, and 500 in Canada. Species are assessed by experts at local, national, and international levels who identify which species are in need of conservation and recovery experts. SAR are protected by federal and provincial legislation, and local stewardship by concerned individuals and communities. Recovery teams work together to learn about SAR, the threats they face, and the actions that are required to recover them, or bring them back to health.

**Did you know?**  
Ontario has more plants and animals than any other province in Canada?



[www.mnr.gov.on.ca](http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca)

The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources has useful information about Species at Risk on their website, including a nifty “widget” that displays a photo of a new species every day.



[www.sararegistry.gc.ca](http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca)

Environment Canada has a website dedicated to SAR in Canada, and the Species at Risk Act. Check it out for excellent information.



“When we tug at a single thing in nature,  
we find it attached to the rest of the world”  
**John Muir, 19th century naturalist**





Snapping Turtle © Brennan Caverhill



Wood Turtle © Brennan Caverhill



Map Turtle © Joe Crowley



Stinkpot Turtle © Joe Crowley



Painted Turtle © Brennan Caverhill



Blanding's Turtle © Brennan Caverhill



Spotted Turtle © Joe Crowley



Softshell Turtle © EC



# Turtles

Turtles are the coolest animals on earth. They have lived here for over 200 million years, and individuals of some species can live for over 100 years. They can hold their breath for hours, or months, they can grow from the size of a toonie to over a tonne, and they occupy most oceans and freshwaters on the planet. There are about 300 species, and over half are at risk of local extinction.

Turtles are threatened worldwide by habitat loss, roads and associated mortality, and collection for the pet trade and the food and medicine trades. Road mortality is one of the biggest threats to turtles in Ontario, where seven of eight turtle species are at risk of extinction (photo to left shows native species) unless threats to their survival are addressed. **YOU can help!**

Turtles play an important ecological, social, and cultural role in our communities. They are the garburators of the wetland, keeping waters clean. They are an important flagship species for conservation, and are keystones in many native cultures. They are a part of our natural heritage, and they will be lost to future generations, unless we work together to help.

Visit [www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/TurtleTally.asp](http://www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/TurtleTally.asp)  
to learn more about the turtles of Ontario,  
and how to identify the native and invasive species.



# Collaboration

## Organizations helping turtles in Ontario

A quick internet search for “turtle conservation in Ontario” will generate informative links about who is helping turtles in Ontario and what these groups are doing to help them recover. All levels of government, universities and colleges, environmental Non Government Organizations, industry, and landowners are leading the conservation efforts, but **anyone can help.**

The logo for the Government of Canada, featuring the word "Canada" in a black serif font with a small Canadian flag to its right.

**Federal Government**  
Parks, Environment, and  
Fisheries and Oceans

The logo for the Government of Ontario, featuring a stylized white flower or leaf symbol to the left of the word "Ontario" in a black serif font.

**Provincial Government**  
Ministries of Transportation and  
Natural Resources



**Municipal Government**  
Conservation Authorities, Zoos,  
Regional Municipalities



**Universities & Colleges**  
From Windsor through Toronto  
and Ottawa

The logo for Ontario Nature, featuring the words "Ontario Nature" in a green serif font, with a green leaf symbol to the right, and "FEDERATION OF ONTARIO NATURALISTS" in a smaller font below.

**environmental NGOs**  
Nature Conservancies, Land  
Trusts, and Education groups



**Landowners, Farmers,  
Industry, and YOU!**

# Research

Universities and colleges,  
government, etc.

Study species, learn about where  
they live, and determine why  
they are in trouble.

To inform our management  
decisions, and make sure we are  
taking the right actions.



# Education

Toronto Zoo, museums, eNGOs,  
government, etc.

Websites, materials,  
presentations, and displays.

To teach key audiences about  
turtle conservation, so they can  
help influence policy and enact  
stewardship.



# Legislation

Municipal, Provincial, and  
Federal governments.

Laws to protect endangered  
species and their habitat.

To help make everyone  
accountable for the protection of  
our natural heritage and  
wildlife.



# Conservation

**Everyone.**

**Protect habitat,  
eliminate threats,  
recover populations.**

**To keep ecosystems intact  
and wild animals alive for  
future generations to  
protect and enjoy.**



# Conservation

What everyone can do to help turtles

## EVERYWHERE

Wherever you see a turtle in Ontario, whether it is at the lake, on the road, or near your property, we want to hear about it! You can write, call, or email the Toronto Zoo's "Ontario Turtle Tally" or submit a report online. It's easy to do, and helps biologists learn more about where turtles live in Ontario!

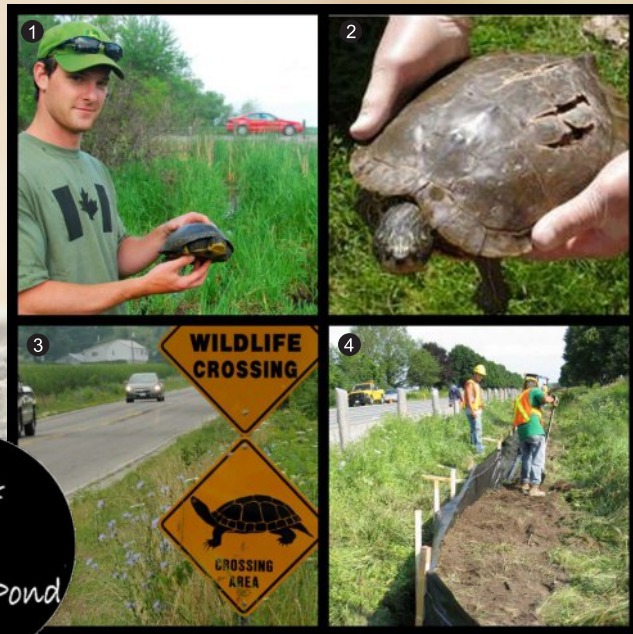
# WHERE HOW

[www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/index.asp](http://www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/index.asp) to report your sightings. Reports from roads are the most important, whether the turtle is dead or alive, because this helps biologists learn where the areas of greatest risk are for the turtles, which allows managers to reduce risks and threats.



## ON THE ROAD

- 1 Remove turtles from the road (consider your safety first)
- 2 Help injured turtles by calling a local vet or trauma center (pg 13)
- 3 Install turtle caution signs at known crossing locations
- 4 Ask the Ministry of Transportation to build turtle protection fences



\* more info on how to help turtles on the road on page 13



## ON YOUR PROPERTY

### Take your P.I.C.

On your land is where you can do the most for turtles.

You can **p**reserve, **i**mprove, or **c**reate new habitat!

**P**RESERVE - if you already have excellent turtle habitat on your property, you can keep it just the way it is. Share your shoreline. Sun in the sand for nesting turtles! You could even receive tax breaks for protecting wetlands.

**I**MPROVE - some wetlands could use some more features that turtles love, like a wide (50 m) buffer of natural habitat between cropland and wetland, or more aquatic vegetation like cattail or pond lilies. You can even add dead logs to float in the water and give the turtles a place to bask in the sun.

**C**REATE - if you are really keen, you can take naturally low lying areas on your property and actually create wetland habitat for turtles. Ducks Unlimited, the Toronto Zoo, and other organizations may be able to help you find funding to create wetland habitat along with you.



# Action

How landowners can contribute specifically

## Turtle Nest Site Construction

- 1 Choose a site with a) south facing exposure, open to sunlight, good drainage (will not flood), away from roads, and near good wetland turtle habitat
- 2 Scrape off the top 6" of plants and soil (at least a 10'x10' area or bigger if possible)
- 3 Bring in a load of pea gravel, and a load of sand
- 4 Lay down landscape cloth over the area, and apply gravel
- 5 Mix the sand in with the pea gravel
- 6 Ideal mixtures have good drainage, no big stones, won't erode away in the rain, and make for easy digging
- 7 Spread the whole mix evenly
- 8 Wait for turtles next spring!

\* Costs would be ~\$1000 depending on the size, and if you have your own equipment and material or not. The best time to build is in the fall, after existing nests have hatched. Funding is available to support your projects. Ask a Toronto Zoo Turtle Researcher for help and advice!

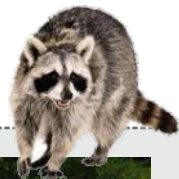


## Turtle Wetland Habitat Construction

If you want to take turtle conservation to the next level, you can even create wetland habitat for turtles and other species on your property. This is a huge and relatively costly endeavor, but it can benefit turtles greatly in the long run. Between 75-90% of wetland turtle habitat has been lost to development in Ontario, so building new wetlands is essential to their health, and ours. Costs would range from five to ten thousand dollars for a medium sized project, but funding and grants are available for such projects. Ask an Adopt-A-Pond employee for assistance and recommendations.



## How to build and use a “Turtle Nest Cage” to protect eggs from predators



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© Megan Crowley

Cut untreated 2x4" lumber into four two-foot lengths. Nail them into a square (4" tall). Cut a 2x2 foot square of wire mesh (2 cm mesh), and nail it to the top of the square. Now you have a nest cage! Be sure to label it with “do not disturb” messages, and your contact information. When you see a turtle lay eggs, watch from a respectful distance. When the mother turtle has left, place the cage over the nest, and weigh it down with rocks, pegs, or spikes. Most turtle nests are predated within 10 days. Remove your nest protector after 14-21 days. Have a party!"



# Steward Stories

Landowners making a difference

## Ellen & Jerry Horak

*Glen Morris, ON*

Ellen and Jerry built an energy efficient passive solar house on a small property just outside Glen Morris. They have seen snapping turtles nesting on their property, and plan to build some nesting sites for them this fall. They live in harmony with the land, growing much of their own vegetables, and generating their own energy.

"We love being green and feeling connected to the landscape around us - we are happy to share our property with mother turtles"



## Frank & Debbie Dorombozi

*Mount Pleasant Creek, ON*

Frank and Debbie have a plot of farmland that surrounds Mount Pleasant Creek. They lease the fields to local farmers to grow crops like soy, and corn. They have left a generous buffer around the creek, filled with trees, birds, deer, and other wildlife. Frank built a little oasis, called "Possum Lodge" where they can watch the plants and animals on his property in peace.

"The animals are so used to me I can watch them be natural in their habitat - I'm proud to help support a population of rare turtles on my wetlands"



## Don Scallen

*Mount Pleasant Creek, ON*

Don does not just stick to his own property, he travels the roads, lakes, wetlands, and waterways of southern Ontario searching for turtles to report to the Tally. He discovered the road mortality hotspot on HWY 24, where a fence was successfully installed to protect the resident turtle populations that are at risk in the province.

"Searching for endangered turtles is great fun - not only is it the ultimate treasure hunt, it also helps conservation "

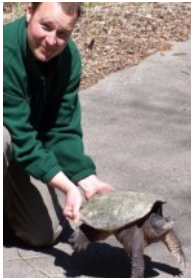




## TAKE TURTLES OFF THE ROAD

*Consider your safety first*

If you see a turtle on the road, stop if you can. Be sure there is a safe place to pull over. Take the turtle to the ditch in the direction it was headed. Carry the turtle low to the ground - they have sharp claws, and are very strong, so be careful not to drop it. Never carry a turtle by the tail - stay to the rear (they can bite) and drag or carry big ones by the shell.



# On the Road

Going the extra mile

## HELP INJURED TURTLES

*Map of Local Trauma Centers to Call*

### ① **Kitchener Area**

Turtle Haven

[www.turtlehaven.ca](http://www.turtlehaven.ca)

(519) 896-0532

### ② **Toronto Area**

Toronto Wildlife Center

[www.torontowildlifecentre.com](http://www.torontowildlifecentre.com)

(416) 631-0662

### ③ **Peterborough Area**

Kawartha Turtle Trauma Center

[www.kawarthaturtle.org](http://www.kawarthaturtle.org)

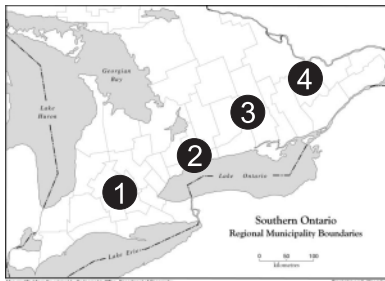
(705) 741-5000

### ④ **Ottawa Area**

Turtle S.H.E.L.L

[www.turtleshellortue.org](http://www.turtleshellortue.org)

(613) 446-9927



## INSTALL CROSSING SIGNS

*At known turtle crossings*

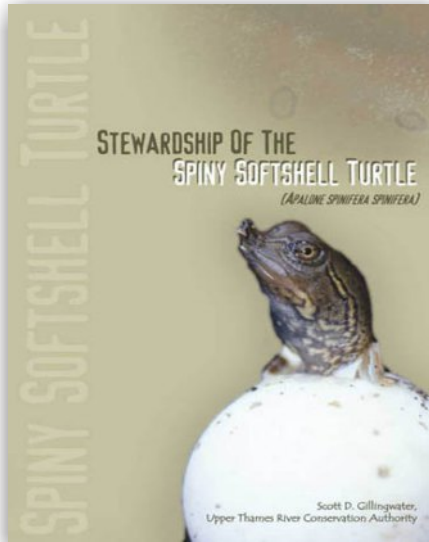
If you know of a location near your property where turtles often cross the road, you can install a crossing sign. Just call Adopt-A-Pond, get permissions from the local municipality of road authority, and we will help with the rest. If this is a major hotspot for crossing, consider asking MTO and conservation groups to build a fence.



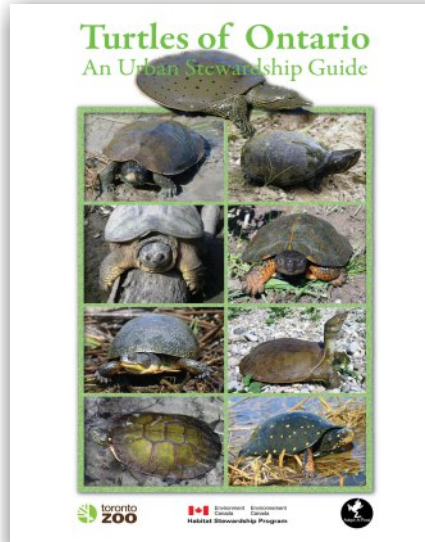
Thanks to the hundreds of people who care enough to rescue injured turtles!

# Resources

## Additional Information



“**Stewardship of the Spiny Softshell**” is an excellent resource for landowners interested in turtle conservation. It is available from the Thames River Conservation Authority, and covers all the turtles in Ontario, and how you can help as a landowner.



“**Turtles of Ontario**” is a brand new resource from the Toronto Zoo’s “Adopt A Pond” programme, which focuses on urban (as opposed to rural) landowner stewardship of turtles in Ontario. You can request a copy from the AAP program staff.




“**SARFIP**” is a funding program run by the province in partnership with federal and municipal agriculture organizations. If you have a farm and an environmental plan, you may apply for funding to improve habitat for turtles (and your farm) on your land.

# Thank You

For taking the time to read this guide, and learn how to help turtles in Ontario

For more information, feel free to contact or visit us in person, or search “**Ontario Turtle Tally**” on the web, facebook, or youtube.  
The more you know, the more you can help!





**Are you a landowner in southern Ontario?  
Do you have wetlands on or near your property?  
If yes, chances are you have encountered turtles recently.  
This guide provides some information regarding what to  
know about turtles in Ontario, and how  
you can help them survive.**

