

# TURTLE TALLY

## CHAPTER 11



The loud ringing of the telephone startled Tota Ma. Sewatis was calling from the city and she sounded very excited. "Tota, guess what Wari and I found when we were looking at the Toronto Zoo's Adopt-A-Pond website at school yesterday? They need communities to go out and watch for turtles. It is called Turtle Tally. The website asked that we go walking and look for turtles in June. This is around the time when they lay their eggs," said Sewatis.

"Tota, can we visit and take a walk with you to the wetland? Maybe we will find some of A'nó:wara's friends," exclaimed Sewatis excitedly. "Uncle Buddy is coming to the reserve from the city and he said that he will bring us if it is okay with you." This idea was very exciting for the children. They hoped Tota Ma would say yes!

Tota Ma was so happy to hear from her grandchildren. It was always nice when they came to visit. She missed them, especially during the long winter. Soon the children would be visiting for the summer.

Tota Ma exclaimed, "How kind of Uncle Buddy. If it is okay with your mom, it is okay with me." Tota Ma's grandchildren were always welcome.

"The women of the 'Friends of the Turtle' walking group have been out every afternoon and on some evenings too! They are looking and listening for signs of spring while they walk," Tota Ma explained. "You will be surprised with some of the things they saw and heard as the marsh and the wetland woke

up this spring. *Tsyokwaris*, *sora* and *tsikara`tanya`ks* singing, even a couple of *z* were spotted down by the open area in the little bay. I am sure they would welcome some more eyes and ears," said Tota Ma.

Sewatis copied the Turtle Tally information from the website to read to his grandmother. "We need to go and watch for signs of turtles, basking in the sun or walking on the road, while looking for places where they might lay eggs. We can even look for signs of turtle nests. I can bring a pair of binoculars and a copy of the Turtle Tally form. We should bring



the turtle poster too! Wari says that he is bringing her new rubber boots just in case we need to go looking into the wetland. We must copy down what we see and then send the information to the Toronto Zoo website. They will take our information and add it to the Turtle Tally results," Sewatis explained.

This sounded like a great idea to Tota Ma as she said goodbye to Sewatis. Tota Ma started getting things ready for her grandchildren's arrival. The sleeping bags and extra pillows were taken out of the closet and hung outside in the fresh air. She

decided to bake a big pan of corn bread and fry up some fresh fish on Friday for their supper. She knew how much her grandchildren loved this meal! Tota Ma called Sose and asked if he would like to come over for dinner as well. She went to bed early that night, looking forward to everyone's arrival.

That night, *A'nó:wara* came to Tota Ma in her dreams to remind her about the *eleventh challenge*. "Come down to the water, Tota Ma. Bring your family with you. Show them how to help the turtles. Tell the Elders where we lay our eggs so our nesting sites can be protected. Come to the water, Tota Ma, and visit with me and my relatives. Count all of the turtle species in your waters."

When Tota Ma's grandchildren arrived, they were excited to hear what their Tota had planned for the weekend! It was a beautiful day and they were hoping it would be something outdoors. Staying at Tota Ma's house was fun because there was so much space to play. Their weekends in the city were very different than their visits with Tota Ma.

"Good morning, my children. Get ready! We have lots to do today. *A'nó:wara* reminded me to check on her family members," said Tota Ma.

Tota Ma explained to Sewatis and Wari the responsible and respectful way for interacting with plants and animals in the water and wetland. She also pulled out the turtle poster from the Toronto Zoo. The poster displayed all

eight Ontario turtle species, which helped to explain the differences between each, making them easier to identify in the wetland.

"The Turtle Tally says to report turtle nests too! We want to make sure we are aware of turtle behaviours to understand how to help them," explained Tota Ma.

Once Tota Ma, Wari, and Sewatis had their binoculars, snacks for the journey, and Turtle Tally forms, they were on their way to *A'nó:wara's* wetland.

When they arrived, they quickly realized how quiet they had to be to spot any wetland creatures.

"I wonder what we will see today?" said Wari. A couple of *Orhyokon* scurried away quickly at the sound of his voice.

"Shhh, you are going to scare everything away!" said Sewatis.

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the pond and noticed something that looked like a rock sitting on top of a log.

"Tota! What is that?" Sewatis asked. Tota Ma quickly looked through her binoculars and spotted a turtle sunning itself.

"That is a Blanding's turtle, my child," answered Tota Ma. "He is sitting on that log to absorb heat from the sun. This is very exciting! According to the turtle poster we have, Blanding's turtles are a threatened species. We must be quiet and not disturb him. Wari, write down on our Turtle Tally forms what we see." Wari quickly recorded the type of turtle.

They continued their walk through the wetland, sharing knowledge about the different plant species they could identify, and the special places Tota Ma could remember from her childhood. Sewatis and Wari began to realize how important wetlands were. Many different types of plants and animals were living in the wetland together. The grandchildren were grateful for this special time with Tota Ma and grateful for the turtles who shared this special place.

On the way home from the wetland, the family helped a turtle cross the road and they thought about the many challenges turtles must overcome. This helped Tota Ma focus on her *twelfth challenge*, to do something else for *A'nó:wara* and her turtle family members.

