



News Release

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Share The Road This Summer

You are traveling along a road and up ahead you see it. Is it a large rock? No, it's moving, but really slow. It's most likely a turtle. During the summer months from May to September, turtles are very active. In the early summer, female turtles, typically Snapping and Painted turtles, leave their ponds and wetlands to find a suitable nesting location. Typically they look for well drained sandy or gravel soil, and often find roadside shoulders suitable to lay their eggs. "Many people are surprised to see a turtle digging a hole and laying her eggs along our roadsides," says Patricia Lowe, Director of Watershed Stewardship for Central Lake Ontario Conservation. "and we know they continue to visit the same nesting sites year after year, regardless of the traffic perils." Once her egg laying is done, she leaves the nest unattended. If the eggs are not eaten by hungry raccoons, skunks and other wildlife shortly after the female lays them, they will hatch into miniature versions of their parents in about 16 weeks. There can be as many as 40 young in a nest and yes, they too cross the road, usually in September, to make their way to a wetland or pond. Not surprisingly, they only have a 1 in 100 chance of making it to adulthood.



Turtle Crossing Road Sign



Snapping turtle hides from a passing car.
Photo courtesy of Ian Mciver.

Central Lake Ontario Conservation (CLOCA) has been actively assessing turtle activity in specific areas of Durham Region in an effort to improve, protect and develop nesting habitat and road crossing features at or in the vicinity of specific conservation areas. "CLOCA Staff have worked very successfully with the Municipality of Clarington and a group called S.H.E.L.L (Safety, Habitat, Education, Long Life) to install turtle crossing signs to alert motorists near the Bowmanville Westside Marshes during the egg laying and hatching seasons," says Ms. Lowe. Many scientists believe that increased road kill of turtles, both the females and young of each year, is contributing to a population decline. We are also collecting data on road kill and surprisingly this year, have found a lot of baby turtles that just

don't make it. If you see a turtle nesting or crossing the road on your travels, please slow down and give them lots of room. What do you do if you find a turtle that has been injured by a vehicle? Patricia suggests contacting the Kawartha Turtle Trauma Centre at 705-748-9301,

ext. 2320 for assistance. On land, a snapping turtle feels very vulnerable and can be very aggressive. If you are picking up an injured turtle, always pick them up from behind and wash your hands after handling. Turtles can carry harmful bacteria such as salmonella. Most of the trauma centre patients require reconstructive surgery, some cables and epoxy and up to a year of recovery time.

Turtles can live from 20 to 80 years depending on the species and the health of its environment. Turtles are largely scavengers and eat a lot of dead and decaying matter making them nature's recyclers. Contrary to popular myth, snapping turtles will not bite your toes when you are swimming. In fact as soon as you hit the water, they will swim in the opposite direction to get away from you.

If you are seeing lots of turtles in your neighbourhood, or know of some nesting sites, you can join the Ontario Turtle Tally. You can enter your sightings online at www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/TurtleTally.asp. On behalf of all the turtles in our wetlands, we thank you for helping this important reptile stay safe this summer.

What we do on the land is mirrored in the water.