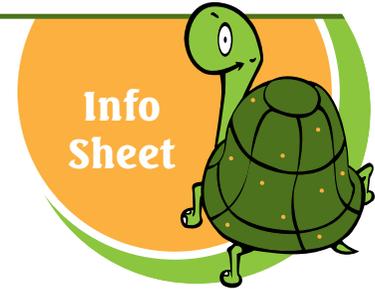


Ontario Turtles



More and more species in Ontario, across Canada, and around the world are at risk for significant reductions in their populations – and indeed, for complete extinction. Major threats to wildlife and plants include pollution, habitat loss, invasive species, and other human-created interferences such as roads and power lines. This means that while human activity is almost totally to blame for the decline of most species in the world today, we also hold the power to ensure their survival.

Turtles at Risk

There are eight turtle species in Ontario. The chart below lists these turtle species and their specific category definitions as of June 2006. Please note that categorization of

Status Categories and Definitions for Ontario Species at Risk, including Turtles

OMNR STATUS		DEFINITION
EXT	Extinct	A species that no longer exists anywhere.
EXP	Extirpated	A species that no longer exists in the wild in Ontario but occurs elsewhere.
END-R	Endangered (Regulated)	A species facing imminent extinction or extirpation in Ontario that has been regulated under Ontario's Endangered Species Act (ESA).
END	Endangered (Not Regulated) Spotted Turtle <i>Clemmys guttata</i>	A species facing imminent extinction or extirpation in Ontario that is a candidate for regulation under Ontario's ESA.
THR	Threatened Blanding's Turtle <i>Emydoidea blandingii</i> Spiny Softshell Turtle <i>Apalone spinifera</i> Stinkpot (Common Musk Turtle) <i>Sternotherus odoratus</i> Wood Turtle <i>Glyptemys (Clemmys) insculpta</i>	A species that is at risk of becoming endangered in Ontario if limiting factors are not reversed.
SC	Special Concern [formerly Vulnerable] Map Turtle <i>Graptemys geographica</i>	A species with characteristics that make it sensitive to human activities or natural events.
UR	Under Review Snapping Turtle <i>Chelydra serpentina</i>	A species that is being examined for its status.

(from http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/mnr/speciesatrisk/SARO_List_june2006.pdf)
(as of June 2006)



The Importance of Turtles

As a cultural icon, the turtle features prominently in today's society. Traditional Aboriginal legends and ancient Greek myths reflecting turtle characteristics and wisdom are still shared today. Increasingly, communities celebrate the annual turtle season each May and June, when most North American turtles lay their eggs.

As a contemporary brand, the turtle's slow-moving but determined manner, protective shell, and non-threatening – often vulnerable – nature make this reptile a popular choice for marketing a variety of consumer products. As well, turtle characters have been known to play the lead in popular children's books, games, TV shows and movies.

Turtle Habitat

While the life habits of various species differ in some respects, all turtles spend spring, summer and fall basking in the sun, seeking mates, feeding, mating and laying eggs, then hibernating once the weather turns cold in winter. In order to survive, turtles require specific forest and wetland habitats that provide:

- biotic (living) components, including food (invertebrates, plant material),
 - safe areas for evading predators (reeds and other shoreline plants), and
 - mates (other turtles of the same species but opposite gender).
- Forest and wetland habitats also provide abiotic (non-living components) required for survival, such as:
- suitable conditions for egg-laying and incubation (fresh gravel or sandy soil, sunshine),
 - hibernation (pond bottom, mud), and
 - safety from predators (water, rocks).

Since there is such an extremely low chance - 1 percent - of a turtle surviving from egg to adulthood, every turtle counts. Despite these odds, North American turtle species possess a legacy of survival that spans tens of thousands of years. However, the loss of each adult turtle is a blow that brings the entire species closer to extinction – forever. Please do everything you can to ensure turtles continue to survive.

How You Can Help Save Turtles

Habitat protection remains one of the most important factors in preventing turtle species from becoming extinct. You can make a direct and significant difference in turtle population stability by donating to organizations that protect their habitats, or by protecting turtle habitat where and how you live and play:

- Do not allow your pet dog to run free; dogs are good at finding, digging up and destroying turtle eggs.
- Do not collect turtles for pets; they need to be left in the wild to reproduce.
- Traffic on roads and highways is a significant source of turtle mortality; do your best to avoid hitting turtles with your vehicle.
- If you are able, carry turtles off roads and transport them (in the direction they were travelling) to a safe wetland nearby.

These small acts will most likely mean the difference between life and death for many turtles. It is also important to educate others on the difference each one of us can make.

