

Take care in turtle-crossing zones



BY EMC NEWS

EMC News - Spring is here and once again, turtles are emerging from their winter hibernation. Many turtles will attempt the hazardous trek across roads and highways in search of nesting sites.

Unfortunately, a turtle's shell is no match for motor vehicles and many turtles are killed on roads every year.

Such traffic fatalities are devastating for the turtle population, as they tend to target adult females looking for places to lay their eggs.

In Ontario seven of eight species of turtles have been classified, by provincial and national authorities, as endangered, threatened or of special concern. The good news is that there are about 700 turtle crossing signs installed on highways throughout Ontario, thanks to the dedication and efforts of the Turtle S.H.E.L.L. Tortue (a registered charitable organization - www.turtleshellortue.org).

We can all do our part by paying close attention to the road and shoulders in these designated turtle crossing areas and near any pond or marsh areas from April to September. Paying attention to the road can save a turtle's life or help prevent an accident.

If you see a turtle crossing the road, help it across. First, make sure that it's safe to help (do not endanger yourself or others by walking into heavy traffic).

Move the turtle in the direction that it is traveling - this might not be toward water. Turtles know where they are going and will turn around and march right

back into traffic if you return them to the side of the road they came from.

Small turtles can be easily carried across the road. Snapping Turtles should be handled very carefully as they will bite. They can be safely moved across the road with an object from your car such as a shovel. Another option is to prod a Snapping Turtle across the road with a long stick. Do not pick up a turtle by the tail; this may damage the vertebrae.

If the turtle is injured it can be brought to any one of the twelve turtle drop-off locations listed on the Web site. These turtles will receive the necessary treatment at the Turtle Care Centre and will be rehabilitated for eventual safe release back into the wild. It is important to record the exact location where the turtle was found, so that it can be returned to its home.

If no distinct landmarks are present, record your odometer reading at the rescue site and then again at the nearest intersection.

Keep the turtle in a quiet, dry and cool place during transport and do not provide any food or water for the time being.

Turtles are long lived, and some species, such as Snapping Turtles, have survived over 60 years in the wild. By rescuing a turtle you not only help increase its lifespan, you also contribute to the preservation of a healthy ecosystem in your neighborhood.

Volunteers and donations are always welcomed to maintain the turtle rehabilitation centre. Please visit www.turtleshellortue.org for further information.