

Help a turtle cross the road

STAFF

For the sixth season in a row, South Nation Conservation is inviting watershed residents to become involved in its ongoing rare turtle protection and enhancement program.

Residents can help by helping turtles cross the road safely and reporting turtle sightings.

But be wary! One of the species involved in the program is the Snapping turtle, which can deliver a sharp bite with its powerful beak to hands and fingers which come too close.

If necessary, in escorting one to safer surroundings, always pick up a Snapping turtle by the rear of its shell.

Never pick up any turtle by its tail as it will more than likely result in injury to the turtle.

Other species-at-risk are the Spotted Turtle, Stinkpot or Musk Turtle, Blanding's Turtle, and the Northern Map Turtle. The Painted turtle isn't endangered and isn't part of the program.

Aimed at monitoring turtle locations, providing and protecting nesting sites, enhancing habitat, and redirecting turtles away from road surfaces and through culverts, the project relies on yearly funding of \$25,000 from the province and about \$60,000 from the federal government.

Provincial funding has been secured for the 2011-12 Rare Turtle study to date. If complete funding is not available, SNC hopes to continue with the program; however it may need to be scaled

back accordingly.

Karen Paquette, SNC Species-At-Risk technician, notes that a high rate of road kills of mature turtles trying to reach preferred nesting sites, along with an assortment of predators going after eggs and hatchlings, means the chance of eggs surviving and then living to reach sexual maturity (anywhere from 10 to 25 human years) is less than one per cent.

Abundant turtles, she added, are seen as a good indicator of a healthy and ecologically stable watershed.

Residents with nests on their properties can try to protect them with chicken wire covers. It's very important to remember to remove the covering after 3 to 4 weeks to allow hatchlings the ability to exit the nest.

One of the program features are turtle crossing signs, with 40 already installed in the watershed and 30 more soon to be added. New to the program this year are two illustrated outdoor tables being designed for conservation areas at High Falls in Casselman and Cass Bridge south of Winchester which describe the characteristics of the turtles in question.

Paquette encouraged members of the public to report to SNC whenever a turtle is encountered, be it alive or dead, providing location, behavior (nesting, road-kill, on road, swimming etc.) and other species. Photos are extremely helpful in confirming identification.