



Royal
Botanical
Gardens

For Immediate Release

Nesting Season brings Challenges for Native Turtles

RBG asking the community to help protect these at-risk species

Hamilton, ON, June 17, 2021 – We are well into turtle nesting season in Ontario and Royal Botanical Gardens (RBG) is asking the community to be on the lookout for female turtles that will be roaming further away from local wetlands to lay their eggs. Unfortunately, turtle populations are in decline — nesting season is critical for rebuilding species numbers, but also comes with a host of challenges for turtles which are largely caused by human activity.

At RBG, staff have been working to protect and conserve habitat for turtles and all wildlife through wetland restoration efforts and RBG's Site-Specific Recovery Plan. To sustain this recovery plan, the Gardens depend on partners and community members to report the location of predated nests and turtles on RBG land who could be nesting or in unsafe areas as soon as possible.

Reporting Turtles on Land on RBG Property

See a turtle on land at or around RBG? Please report your observation as soon as possible to the proper resources.

When making a report, ensure you include the following:

- Who: your name and contact information.
- What: the species if known, number of turtles and what it/they are doing. Photos are helpful to identify and locate, but only if you can do so safely and without crowding (and thereby harassing) the turtle.
- Where: as specific a location as possible. Phone maps can pinpoint your exact location.
- When: date and time of your observation. Timely reports are key.

Do not post the location of turtles or nests publicly on social media; you can:

- *Inform an RBG staff member or volunteer (if nearby).*
- *Privately message RBG's social media accounts ([Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#)) to keep the turtles safe.*
- *If RBG's main centre is re-opened and a stay-at-home order is no longer in effect, you can call RBG's front desk (905-527-1158).*

Nesting turtle: nesting-in-progress is an **urgent** report. If the turtle appears to be digging with its hind feet or looks perched with its rear end planted in the dirt, it is likely nesting. GIVE THE TURTLE PLENTY OF SPACE, DO NOT APPROACH IT. Call RBG's front desk (905-527-1158) or privately message us through social media.

Predated nest or dead turtle: important to report to RBG for understanding habitat use, nest success rates and mortality. Contact RBG through social media or email sricher@rbg.ca.

Clearly injured turtle (blood is visible): call Hamilton Animal Services (905-574-3433) for Princess Point, Rock Garden and Arboretum, Burlington Animal Services (905-335-3030) for Hendrie Valley and Laking Garden.

Turtle crossing the road: If it is safe for you to do so, help the turtle [cross the road](#) in the direction it is heading. If it's not safe for you to stop or help, call the Dundas Turtle Watch hotline (289-775-1351).

About our Native Turtles

Although there are seven species native to the area, there are only four species of turtles that can still be found at RBG — Northern Map Turtles, Midland Painted Turtles and Snapping Turtles are all listed as Special Concern, while Blanding's Turtles are endangered. Turtles live long lives and, depending on the species, will take between six to 20 years to reach sexual maturity.

Turtles spend most of their time in the wetlands but move to surrounding upland habitats to nest. Nesting occurs late May through July, with female turtles burying their eggs in dry, sunny, open areas where soils are warm and loose enough for digging. The number of eggs laid varies by species but averages around three to 45 eggs. Most hatchlings emerge between late July to October, but some will spend winter in their nests before emerging the following spring. Most eggs will not reach maturity — it's estimated that for every 1,400 Snapping Turtle eggs laid, only one will survive to adulthood. Low hatchling survival rates combined with the many years needed to reach sexual maturity means turtles are more susceptible to population decline.

Threats

- **Road mortality:** Whether crossing in search of food, mates, habitat or nesting areas, turtles are at great risk of getting hit by vehicles. Several hundred turtles have died on the roads around RBG in the last decade alone. Hotspots include Old Guelph Road, Plains Road West, Cootes Drive, Olympic Drive, and King Street East.
- **Habitat loss:** Pollution, development and habitat fragmentation have all greatly reduced healthy habitats for native species, including turtles.
- **Invasive species:** Irresponsible pet owners releasing their unwanted non-native Red-eared Sliders into local wetlands not only risk introducing disease to native turtles, but also increase competition for limited resources like food, basking areas, and nesting sites.
- **Predation:** Predators like raccoons, skunks, foxes and opossums target turtle nests for their eggs. While predation is a natural occurrence, human actions like feeding wildlife and littering attract these animals and raise predation to unsustainable levels.
- **Poaching/Smuggling:** Our native turtle species are targeted by poachers for the illegal pet trade and consumption. Poachers monitor social media for tags and pictures that could help them locate turtles and nests.

These and other factors are causing native turtles to be removed from the population faster than they can be replaced. RBG staff and volunteers work to mitigate these threats by installing fencing to prevent road mortality and supplementing nesting habitat in safe location. Species at Risk staff have the necessary training and permits to protect turtles and their nests when necessary.

How to Help

- Report turtle sightings if you see them on land. Help from visitors and neighbours has been integral to RBG's efforts — community members have helped to save hundreds of hatchlings!
- If you find a turtle, do not crowd it — turtles fear us, and crowding can cause it to become stressed and abandon its nesting efforts.

- Avoid posting anything about the location of wild turtles on social media — well-meaning people may come and crowd the turtle in an effort to see it.
- Drive safely — what looks like a rock could be a turtle trying to cross the road.
- Learn how to help a turtle cross the road with [this video](#) from the Toronto Zoo. Never pull or lift the turtle by its tail as it connects to its spine and the action could dislocate it.
- Consider supporting RBG with a [donation](#) to our conservation projects.

Protection and preservation of our remaining native turtle species is crucial to maintaining biodiversity in our region. RBG relies on help from community members to be able to complete the critical work needed to have balanced, natural spaces for generations to come.

Resources:

[Webpage: Turtles of RBG](#)

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For media inquiries, please contact:

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