

Vanishing Species

Today, despite being in a protected area, only four of the seven species native to RBG can still be found here.

If you see one of these turtles, please call or email to tell us!



Eastern Musk Turtle



Eastern Spiny Softshell Turtle



Wood Turtle



Blanding's Turtle

Eastern Musk Turtle (*Sternotherus odoratus*)

COSEWIC Status: Special Concern

Last seen here: Observed at The Fishway in 2009

This turtle needs a lot of aquatic plants. When carp, pollution and watershed-wide drainage regime changes caused Cootes Paradise Marsh to lose most of its plants, this turtle lost its home. RBG and partners are working to re-establish native wetland plants.

Eastern Spiny Softshell Turtle (*Apalone spinifera*)

COSEWIC Status: Endangered

Last confirmed here: 1984

In 2011, a reported local sighting of this species created excitement at RBG. It turned out to be a similar but non-native species that was illegally and irresponsibly released into the Marsh.

Wood Turtle (*Glyptemys insculpta*)

COSEWIC Status: Threatened

Last seen here: Uncertain
Historically, this species once occurred in the areas surrounding RBG – the wooded ravines it lives in are common in Cootes Paradise Nature Sanctuary.

Blanding's Turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*)

COSEWIC Status: Endangered

Last seen here: This year
RBG population estimate: 25
This turtle has a bright yellow neck and chin, and a more dome-like shell than the Painted Turtles that are still common here. Hard work is being put into keeping this turtle from disappearing from RBG.

If you see a turtle on land, observe it with respect.

It may be hard to tell, but turtles are frightened of people. Most turtles seen on land are simply searching for a safe place to dig their nest and lay eggs. They are vulnerable out of the water and defend themselves if approached. Please keep yourself and your pets at minimum a few metres away, and try not to disturb turtles that you see. Most importantly, **do not pick up a turtle while it is nesting.**

If you see a turtle in danger, help it to get to where it is going.

Roadways and sidewalks are potentially dangerous places for turtles. If you find one, it's okay to move it (or help it move) to a safer location **in the direction it is heading**, provided that you are safe and can help the turtle without being hurt yourself.

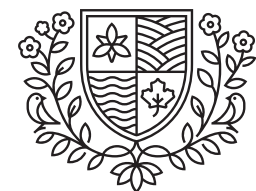
If you find an injured turtle

please contact one of these organizations:

- Hamilton Animal Services: 905-574-3433
- Toronto Wildlife Centre: 416-631-0662
- Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre: 705-741-5000
- Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry: 1-800-667-1940; www.ontario.ca/page/find-wildlife-rehabilitator

Want more information?

905-527-1158; fax: 905-577-0375
info@rbg.ca
680 Plains Road West
Burlington, ON L7T 4H4
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Turtles 101

The turtles at RBG spend most of their time in the wetlands, but move into the surrounding upland habitat to nest in late spring and early summer.

Nesting occurs late May through July, with female turtles burying their eggs in dry sunny open areas, often on south-facing slopes, where soils are warm, well-drained and loose enough for digging.



Depending on the species, turtles typically lay between three and 45 eggs. While most turtles hatch in late summer, some spend the winter in the nest before emerging between late April to late June the following spring.

Threats to Turtles

Impacts caused by humans are removing turtles from the population faster than they can naturally be replaced, especially adult females of breeding age. Studies have shown removing more than 2 percent of turtles from a given area's population each year can extirpate a region's population within our lifetime.

Turtles are slow to reach sexual maturity. This, combined with the loss, degradation and fragmentation of habitat, development of shorelines and wetland-adjacent lands, logging, agricultural machinery, boats and off-road vehicles, road mortality, persecution, poachers and collectors, inflated nest predator numbers, environmental contaminants, and non-native and invasive species, it takes too high a toll – our turtles are dwindling and disappearing.

Turtles and Traffic

Roads around wetlands are deadly to turtles. From spring through fall, turtles wander on to roads as they search for mates, nesting sites, food, or more wetland habitat.

Basking, nesting and mark-recapture studies indicate the total native turtle population at RBG is declining. It is estimated that over 400 turtles have died on the roads around RBG in the past decade alone – an unsustainable rate of loss.

Road mortality hotspots around RBG include Cootes Drive, Olympic Drive and King Street East in Dundas, Old Guelph Road, Spring Gardens Road, Plains Road West and Unsworth Avenue in Burlington.

When you are driving these roads and others, especially in spring through fall, slow down – that rock you see in your lane might be a turtle crossing the road. If you see one, and it's safe to do so, you can help the turtle to cross to the other side of the road in the direction it is heading.

Tips on safely handling Snapping turtles:

- The safest way to move a large turtle is using a shovel, tarp, and/or large plastic container.
- Snapping turtles can bite halfway down their shell, so only touch the back half.
- A turtle's tail is connected to its backbone. **NEVER pick a turtle up by its tail!** This can cause dislocations and eventual death.
- If on the road, wear a safety vest and gloves, and always wash your hands after handling a turtle.
- Toronto Zoo created a helpful 3-minute video: How to Help a Snapping Turtle Cross the Road. Watch on youtube.com.



Nest Predation

Turtle eggs are a food prized by nest predators, such as raccoons, skunks, opossums, foxes, coyotes, and mink. Predation is a natural and healthy part of a food web, but human activity has inflated nest predator numbers far beyond what is natural. This is especially true in parks and suburban areas, where unnaturally high raccoon and skunk populations are maintained by garbage and wildlife feeding. In some areas, nest predators cause up to 100% mortality of turtle eggs.

How to help protect turtle eggs from predation:

- Don't leave food out for wildlife
- Leave your pet's food dishes indoors
- Put garbage out in secure containers
- Never release any wildlife at RBG
- If a turtle has nested on your property, contact RBG about measures available to help protect the nest.



Turtles as Pets

Many people buy pet turtles when they are small and cute, without realizing what they are getting into. Turtles live a long time! If you get one as a pet for your child, be prepared to still have a much larger turtle when your kids go off to college and even when they start a family of their own.

If you have a pet you don't want anymore, do not release it into the wild. It is not native to this area, not used to our winters, could introduce disease to our wild turtles, and it causes our own dwindling native species to have to compete with them for food and space. Responsible pet owners contact a pet store or a reptile rescue about re-homing their pet.



Nature Sanctuaries

RBGs' natural lands are recognized as important habitat through several **significant designations:**

- UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve
- Nationally Important Bird Area (IBA)
- Class 1 and 2 wetlands
- Area of Natural & Scientific Interest (ANSI)
- Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA)

With a variety of habitats adjacent to extensive wetlands, it's no surprise that RBG is home to four native turtle species. Sadly, these turtles are in decline and now all of Ontario's turtles are listed as species at risk.

RBG has been working to protect and restore habitat for turtles and all wildlife through wetland restoration efforts, and our Species at Risk program. These **projects include:**

- Monitoring and improving water quality
- Managing invasive species
- Increasing native marsh vegetation
- Turtle population studies
- Nest habitat improvement
- Temporary fences to reduce road mortality
- Nest and egg protection

Support RBG's Nature Sanctuaries Become an RBG member!

905-527-1158 (1-800-694-4769), ext. 514
membership@rbg.ca
www.rbg.ca/membership