

Turtles in February?

To the Editor,

After the impact climate change had on Ontario Turtles last year it is very concerning that we are only a couple months into 2018 and it shows all the signs of another year fraught with erratic weather systems, temperature fluctuations and the potential of knocking the ecosystem off balance.

This information is intended as a precaution because double digits temperature are a possibility but who's to know for sure because every weather source consulted has something different to say. I personally think the most accurate weather forecast is, surprise! The widespread thaw and flooding in regions throughout Ontario last week has upped concerns among the wildlife conservation community especially as the next 14 days suggest more mild temperatures as well as rain in some parts.

During your travels, please keep an eye out for turtles that have been enticed out of brumation (hibernation) by the milder temperatures and periodic sunny spells. They won't be hard to spot against the white to dirty white ice covered lakes.

If you come across a turtle in such circumstances please exercise ice safety rules and do not venture on to the ice unless it is safe for you to do so. It is recommended that prior to any attempts to help a turtle concerned citizens contact the Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre 705-741-5000 home of Kawartha Turtle Trauma Centre in Selwyn to better assess the situation and assist you and the turtle.

When a turtle comes out of brumation prematurely they will likely be somewhat disoriented and may not be able to find their way back under the lid of ice on the body of water to their winter dormancy. Stranded on the ice a turtle will in time succumb to dehydration and cooler temperatures sudden or otherwise. Although the milder temperatures as early as February may appeal to us in some ways, for turtles and other wildlife it is a different matter. Should they emerge early from their winter dormancy it puts them at risk. Limited food availability, predator activity and the probability of winter's return if not full force then to some degree could effect their survival. After all it is still winter and 'surprise' that could easily mean more cold temperatures and wintry conditions to come.

As an added note seeing as it's anyone's guess as to how the next few weeks and beyond are going to play out please also watch out for wee juvenile turtles emerging from their overwintering nests. There was an overall absence of painted turtle hatchlings back in the fall indicating many may have stayed in their nests over the winter. The double digits spring like temperatures possibly headed our way sooner than expected could result in last year's hatchlings showing up much earlier this year. They may be the little greenish dots eagerly heading across roads. Again, think of safety first, for you and the other motorists on the roads. Your assistance in looking out for the turtles during the coming weeks and through the turtle season ahead is a kindness that could greatly benefit the Ontario turtle populations.

The same applies for wildlife emerging from hibernation early. They may not be as sure footed and swift to get off the roads. For your sake and their sake please be mindful of potential wildlife encounters while driving.

Thank you for your shared concerns and efforts to help the Ontario turtles, wildlife and their habitat.

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