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1,071 turtles admitted to trauma centre

July 23, 2019

To the Editor,

Turtle wise it has been all go and super busy in all regards the last few weeks with turtle nesting getting such a late start.
We are now past the turtle nesting peak period, this week will no doubt see a bit more nesting, after that there will be some slowpokes, followed by the turtles settling into their summer routines. With the high temperatures they will be less inclined to be on the move. Keeping in mind however that turtles could turn up on the roads at any time during turtle season, typically April to early November depending on the temperatures and weather patterns. Even with the high temperatures there could be the odd snapping turtle spotted basking on the warm pavement, so please keep an eye out.
As of July 10, 1,071 turtles have been admitted to the Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre home of Ontario's turtle hospital. Ninety per cent of the turtles admitted have been as of the result of being struck by a motor vehicle. In large part these incidents could have been avoided had it not been for motorists speeding, engaging in distracted driving and aggressive driving.
The 1,071 injured turtles admitted to the turtle hospital at the turtle hospital is no doubt upsetting and concerning as it has increased significantly from the little over 400 turtles admitted in 2016, 921 turtles in 2017 and 945 turtles in 2018. However, there is a positive aspect at work here. That being that awareness has increased to the extent that injured turtles from all across Ontario are finding their way, thanks to the kindest of people, to the turtle hospital instead of being left on or near the roads. This means that people in communities throughout Ontario that were not aware there was a turtle hospital or that there is a phone number to call about an injured turtles or did not know that the turtle they drove by with a cracked shell could possibly survive his/her injuries if the turtle gets to the turtle hospital or that the turtle they spotted on the road may be gravid (with eggs) and/or that they could be instrumental in helping injured turtles in this way are now aware. And awareness continues to spread.
Another factor to mention and keep in mind is that there are 444 Municipalities in Ontario. Some of these would be urban communities that would see little turtle activity except on the outskirts and the other Municipalities would be rural communities where the chances of turtle activity on the roads in more prevalent. So in an effort to understand how the number of admissions could be so high in spite of increased awareness location and the size of the area has to be taken into consideration. The admissions are not from one concentrated Municipality but instead a widespread area being all of Ontario, making the number a little less disconcerting. Obviously a higher concentration of turtles being in cottage country, the region known as ?The Land Between? there would be more injured turtle incidents but this does not account for them all. The increased number of admissions is a sign that spreading awareness is taking hold and serving to help ensure that as many injured turtles as possible no matter where they are located in Ontario are getting the help they need to receive medical attention and hopefully survive their injuries. In some cases, sadly this is not to be and hopefully their offspring can at least go on to live the long and fruitful life the mother did not get a chance at.
There is much more awareness raising to be done as the high admissions is a very real indication that motorists have become lax about their driving practices. Nobody claims to be guilty of this but yet turtles and other wildlife are being struck by motor vehicles. This is backed up by the fact that the O.P.P. is currently cracking down on motorists that are speeding, engaging in distracted driving and aggressive driving.
Although you may be attentive about your driving and keeping an eye for turtles and other wildlife on the roads please make a point of reminding young drivers in your household, visitors you know will be headed to cottage country and anyone in general you cross paths with to please drive wildlife aware and watch for turtles on the roads and ATV trails. Thank you for your time and assistance in this regard!

Kelly Wallace,
L'Amable