

Help identify turtle hotspots

To the Editor,

Turtles have been roaming these parts long before land development, roads and motor vehicles. Ideally, it would be great if the turtles would stay off the roads. A notion that seems highly improbable but not impossible as the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry is now focusing efforts on the strategic conservation of ecosystems and species at a landscape level. Barrier walls have been designed to prevent turtles and other small animals from accessing the roads. Ecopassages have been designed to re-route turtles as well as other wildlife through passages under existing roads. These measures are costly and intended as permanent fixtures to be co-ordinated with infrastructure upgrades so it will take time to address hotspots in these ways.

An intermediate strategy to help deter turtles and other small animals from accessing the roads is the geotextile reptile and amphibian fencing being installed along roadsides that is more and more becoming a part of the landscape. This can be costly as the fencing needs to run long expanses to combat the persistence of turtles attempting to find a way around the fencing and it takes time for road assessment surveys to be conducted and for the installation of the fencing to be carried out which encompasses many considerations for proper installation. It is imperative that the fencing is routinely checked for damage and sagging and repairs are done prior to the start of nesting season as the effectiveness of the fencing is dependent on its condition. The fencing, ecopassages and barrier walls are all undergoing monitoring to assess their effectiveness. There is widespread support throughout Ontario for the aforementioned conservation approaches and others and there is no doubt that various hotspots will be addressed using these approaches and others in the foreseeable future. In the meantime, implementing more immediate measures such as turtle awareness road signs in Bancroft, L'Amable and the surrounding area may help to reduce the number of turtles injured and killed on the roads. Although area residents may be familiar with some of the wanderings of the turtles on the roads and locations more prone to turtle activity; turtles still get struck by motor vehicles. During cottage season which coincides with nesting and hatching season tourists from near and far flock to this region of Ontario for the beauty and splendor it has to offer but most are not familiar with the turtle activity. The placement of turtle road signs would serve to increase overall awareness in aid of ensuring more turtles have a future. I am currently in the process of gathering data in conjunction with the lead on wildlife mitigation policy at the Ministry of Transportation regarding various high-risk road mortality locations in Bancroft and L'Amable. The aim is to have these locations identified and validated as road mortality hotspots to be approved for the signs. This validation is to be conducted by the MTO in conjunction with the MNRF. This has been a particularly bad year for turtles. On July 10, the Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre (home of Kawartha Turtle Trauma Centre) declared a state of emergency in Ontario after treating nearly 600 injured turtles this year that were struck by motor vehicles. This does not include the number of turtles that never made it to the trauma centre and died on the roads and the number of turtles that have been treated and died since July. The trauma centre has treated double the number of Turtles they treated last year at this time.

For the most part, the turtles seen on the roads are the adult females on a mission to get to the nesting sites they favour. Personally, I can't help admiring the kind of determination these turtles display in getting to where they aim to get no matter what obstacles are put in their way. I just wish this did not include roads and motor vehicles. With seven out of the eight species of turtles native to Ontario at risk it is crucial that the adult female turtles gets to their nesting sites. If you have ever stopped to help a turtle cross a road you know they don't think they need help but they do and that is where we come in.

If you are a person that has taken note of any turtles on the roads this year or last year alive, injured or dead I would very much like to speak with you. Your knowledge of the turtle activity in the Bancroft, L'Amable and surrounding area would be considered very beneficial for the purposes of further validation.

Please contact Kelly by text or phone at 647-606-9537 or e-mail me at kkwalrus@yahoo.ca. Thank you very much for taking the time to read this notice. I look forward to possibly hearing from you.

Kelly Wallace