

Think Turtle Conservation Initiative needs help monitoring nests



By Nate Smelle

Think Turtle Conservation Initiative is calling on all ATV riders, dog walkers, hikers, strollers, and cyclists that use the Heritage Trail in the vicinity of downtown Bancroft area to help them monitor two sensitive turtle nests.

According to Think Turtle's managing director Kelly Wallace, the first of the two nests they need a hand keeping an eye on is located near where the path from the bridge across from Millennium Park meets the Heritage Trail. The second sensitive nesting site, she said, is located a little further down the trail on the left-hand side.

While turtle hatchlings can emerge from their nest from late August until mid-October or even later, Wallace said most tend to hatch during the month of September. Recognizing that hatchling activity will increase significantly over the next month, she said Think Turtle is looking for more volunteers to help keep an eye on the two nesting sites alongside the Heritage Trail near downtown Bancroft.

"Once people see the nesting sites and realize what it is, I'm sure they'll stop to have a look," said Wallace.

"The one nest is in an area where it will pretty much be straddled by any tires, so it's fine that way. Except for the fact we are coming up to a time now where there could be hatchlings right there. It's important to keep turtle nests in their natural environment. It's not a secret that we are in turtle country, and that basically we have to coexist with wildlife... With everybody working together we can keep an eye out and protect them to make sure that the turtle hatchlings get safely to water."

Although there are currently low-profile nest protectors over each of the nests, Wallace said someone has been covering up the protectors in sand. Thanks to Think Turtle's volunteers who have been monitoring the nesting sites, she said they have been able to clean them out without any damage to the nests.

With permission from the Town of Bancroft, Wallace said they are going to install a larger raised nest protector with a wooden frame. The new nest protectors will do a better job protecting the sites, she said, as well as making them more visible to the public. Whenever she personally checks on these nests, Wallace said she takes time to let anyone she runs into on the trail know they are there. As far as she is concerned, "the more eyes on the nests the better."

If anyone notices hatchlings emerging from the two identified sites on the Heritage Trail behind Millennium Park, or any local turtle nesting sites, Wallace asks that they contact her immediately by phone/text at: 647-606-9537. Acknowledging that some nests can

hatch completely within 24 hours, she said it is critical that Think Turtle Conservation Initiative becomes aware of hatchling activity as soon as possible.