

Watch for wildlife



By Nate Smelle

TRAVELING THROUGHOUT ONTARIO'S Cottage Country at any time of year, it is always wise to keep an eye out for local wildlife on the move. Each year, approximately two dozen moose are killed in motor vehicle collisions in Algonquin Provincial Park alone. In the last two weeks of this past May, four moose were killed in collisions along the stretch of Hwy 60 running through the park. According to a report on wildlife/vehicle collisions in the province by the Ontario Ministry of Transportation, there are about 12,000 wildlife collisions every year, leading to approximately 400 human injuries. Acknowledging that 79 per cent of wildlife vehicle collisions and 50 per cent of all fatal crashes occur on rural, two-lane roads, it makes good sense for drivers to stay alert and scan the road ahead for domestic, farm or wild animals, when behind the wheel in North Hastings. Furthermore, nationwide, motor vehicle collisions with wildlife cause about \$800 million in damages annually. Although a run in with a 700 kilogram, three-metre long bull moose is likely to have a more disastrous outcome than running over a red squirrel, either type of encounter can produce dangerous or even deadly consequences. As spring transforms into summer, and the local food supply nurturing resident wildlife grows more abundant, many species become more active as they make the most of this seasonal opportunity. In addition, the warmer temperatures provoke several other species to migrate to their nesting sites. Ontario's eight species of turtles are among this crowd of creatures on a quest to return to their nest. In North Hastings, and throughout most of the territory we label "Cottage Country" nesting season is typically from mid-May to mid-July. As we approach the peak of nesting activity, we can expect to see more turtles on the move. Unfortunately, this means we can also expect to see more turtles killed or injured in motor vehicle collisions. Depending on the species, temperature, and individual turtle nesting can last anywhere from 30 minutes to over two hours. Because the sandy shoulders of rural roads provide the right conditions for nesting, this increases the level of risk for turtles and drivers trying to avoid them. For those who encounter a nesting turtle in Cottage Country, Think Turtle Conservation Initiative's Kelly Wallace says it is best to give her space and ensure the nesting process is not disturbed. Ideally, she says it is also recommended to keep at least 10 metres between yourself and the nesting turtle. Wallace says it is also important to keep companion animals away from nesting turtles, since they can stress the turtle out and force her to abandon her nest. "Nesting turtles that abandon their nests will need to finish laying their eggs," explains Wallace. "Having initially been spooked during daylight hours a turtle may come back to the same area to nest or close by under the cover of night. This would result in a nest that is particularly vulnerable to predation overnight or during the wee hours of the morning." After she has finished laying her eggs and covering her nest, Wallace says you can help reduce turtle road mortality by observing which direction she heads; and, if necessary help her cross the road in the direction she is going. When helping a turtle cross the road, Wallace says it is imperative to always make safety your number one priority. If you find an injured or deceased turtle anywhere in Ontario, Wallace advises you to call the Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre, home of Ontario's turtle hospital, at: 705-741-5000. She says their team of volunteers will provide medical care for the turtle or any eggs recovered at no charge. The OTCC also has "Turtle Taxi" volunteers to assist with transportation of turtles from anywhere in Ontario.