

# Turtle Trauma

This activity center is part of the **Water Protection** theme.

## Purpose of this Activity:

This activity teaches the risks turtles endure to lay their eggs to maintain their population. Students will be encouraged to see the world from a turtle's perspective.

## Key Messages:

- Turtle populations are at risk because of human encroachment and increased vehicle traffic.
- Become involved with conservation efforts.

## Materials

- Turtle crossing sign
- 12 Ping-pong balls
- Turtle sand box
- 2 cloth ties
- 2 beach balls
- Kawartha Trauma Centre Poster (laminated)

## What will I be doing?

You will explain how turtles contribute to water quality and how we can help turtles to survive.

Turtles live on the land and in the water. Turtles help keep rivers, lakes, and shorelines clean by eating pondweeds, algae, and carrion (dead fish and other dead animals), thereby cleaning up the water.

In Ontario there are painted, snapping, blanding's, wood, eastern spiny soft shell, map, musk, and spotted turtles.

Most of the world's turtle populations are experiencing a catastrophic decline. Unfortunately many of Ontario's turtle populations are at risk.

Turtles must survive 13 to 18 years before being able to produce offspring. Some species of turtles only lay eggs every other year. Females lay 4 to 30 eggs per clutch. Only one or two out of every 100 hatchlings will survive to adulthood.

The most serious threat to the turtle populations in Ontario is mortality from being hit by vehicles. When female turtles cross roads to reach nesting areas they can be hit by passing cars and injured or killed. If as little as 5% of adult female turtles in a population are killed on roadways each year the turtle population will eventually be extirpated (the population ceases to exist in a given area).

## The Turtle Road Crossing Game

Ask 2 students to volunteer to be "turtles".

-Lightly tie each volunteer turtle's knees together using a cloth tie.

-Give each "turtle" 6 ping-pong balls to hold onto – these are their eggs.

-Tell the remaining children they are the cars and the beach balls are the car wheels.

- Position the "cars" 15 feet back on each side of the path the turtles must take while crossing the road. "

**-Instruct the "cars" that they can only roll the ball at the turtle, and they cannot move any closer to the turtles.**

-The "turtles" must try to cross the road, deposit all their eggs in the sandbox and cross back without getting hit by a car.

## Questions to Ask Students:

**Q:** How can we help turtles that are crossing on the road?

**A:** pay attention to turtle crossing signs, drive carefully in areas with rivers, ponds and wetland areas, as these are places the turtles like to live.

**Q:** Where do turtles lay their eggs? Do they sit on their nests?

**A:** There are many different places turtles lay their eggs. It depends on the species of turtle. The Painted Turtle likes to lay her eggs in soft, sandy soil with exposure to sun to keep the eggs warm. Wood turtles choose sandy banks next to running water. Blanding's turtles prefer sandy soils but will lay their eggs on grass lawns, gardens or gravel road edges.

No the female turtles do not sit on their nest. They lay the eggs cover the hole an leave.

**Q:** Other than injury due to cars, what are other factors that harm turtles?

**A:** Turtles homes are being destroyed by urban development by filling in wetlands and the destruction of freshwater habitat such as ponds and small lakes. Nest predation of eggs by raccoons, skunks, birds, and other mammals and birds love turtle eggs.

## **Background Information:**

Turtles in Ontario are in decline and need our help. Being hit by cars is one of the highest causes of turtle death and injury.

After the game discuss how difficult it is for turtles to avoid fast moving cars and trucks, and how drivers can help stop turtles being injured on our roads so they can continue to help keep the rivers and lakes clean.

Use of highway signs warning drivers to watch for turtles can help reduce turtle deaths. Injured turtles can be brought to the Kawartha Turtle Trauma Centre where the turtles receive veterinary treatment and daily care. The turtles are released back to their natural habitat as soon as their injuries heal.

Other ways to help turtles:

Everyone can help turtles by not taking animals from their natural habitat for pets. Consider a hamster, dog or cat instead.

You can help a turtle cross a roadway. If you spot a turtle in the middle of a road you can move it to the side of the road it was heading for. (But make sure there is no traffic and it is safe to do so first.) And don't try to pick up a snapping turtle... they can really bite if they think they are in danger!

You can get involved with conservation groups like *Kids 4 Turtles* or become a member of the *Kawartha Turtle Trauma Centre*.

## **Clean Up Procedures:**

Place all the materials in to the box provided and place in one corner of the sandbox.