

Nature Conservancy of Canada calls on public to help turtles cross road

Collisions between motorists and turtles are a serious concern in Canada.

These can happen on back roads on the way to the cottage and on busy roads in major centres, like the GTA. The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is asking drivers to help protect these turtles, if safe to do so.

NCC has produced a video with tips on how drivers can help return wayward turtles to safety. Seven of Ontario's eight different turtle species are listed as at risk in the province. One of the major threats to turtle populations is being hit by vehicles.

Turtles use roads to bask in the warmth and lay eggs on the shoulder. The death of one adult turtle has a big impact on the population as a whole. It takes turtles about 20 years to reach reproductive age. Once they reach that age they can lay hundreds of eggs throughout their lifetime. A loss of one adult turtle is the loss of 20 years of development.

“Turtles are not just adorable, they're an important part of wetland ecosystems,” said Kristyn Ferguson, NCC conservation scientist.

“They help keep wetlands clean and healthy by eating dead plants, insects and animals, and play the role of the wetland janitor.”

Tips and facts

• Make sure the road is safe to pull over and help. Put safety first.

• Move the turtle in the direction it was going, otherwise it will likely try to cross again.

• For turtles that hide their heads in their shells (like the Blanding's turtle and the Midland painted turtle), simply pick the turtle up and carry it across the road.

• Snapping turtles weigh as much as 34 kilograms (75 pounds) and have heavy, spiked tails and massive armoured shells. These turtles cannot hide their heads in their shells and have a dangerously sharp snout. To move them and avoid injury, lift using the “handles” on either side of their tails on the back of their shells and “wheelbarrow” them across the road on their front legs.

• Pushing or shoving turtles across roads with feet or sticks isn't advisable. Their shells aren't as thick underneath, and rough pavement can do a lot of damage.

• Other threats to turtles include habitat loss, invasive species and illegal collection for the pet trade.



Here's how to help a snapping turtle get across the road.