

Interim Project Report to Ontario Wildlife Foundation Submitted by



ONTARIO TURTLE CONSERVATION CENTRE

HOME OF THE KAWARTHA TURTLE TRAUMA CENTRE

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Protecting Ontario's At-risk Turtles and their Wetland Habitats through Active Public Stewardship

A. Background:

In 2016, Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre (OTCC) received initial funding from the Ontario Wildlife Foundation to develop and launch an extended education and outreach program on Ontario's at-risk turtles and their wetland habitats. In just two years, we have increased our reach from 4000 people per year to 14,000 people. We are grateful that OWF has supported us this year to build on this success. The objective of this year's project is to take our educational outreach work a step further by not only increasing knowledge and understanding, but also expanding the resources and support we provide in order to enable citizen action.

In all of our education programs, participants meet our non-releasable education turtles and learn about their unique biological characteristics, requirements, and role in our wetland ecosystems. Issues addressed include road, fishing and boating mortality, consumption of turtles for food, poaching of native turtles for the pet trade, and how to safely and knowledgeably help a turtle when one is encountered on our roadways. We maximize impact by ensuring that citizens can connect to support (print and on-line resources), and specific targeted citizen science projects (both our own and those of partner organizations). Participants are given suggestions as to how they can become involved and take action.



B. Project Impact:

1. Delivery of Workshops and Presentations on Turtles and Wetlands



In 2018, over 14,000 people of all ages and backgrounds attended in-depth, hands-on workshops. Included in this number are 6825 students. Over 135 sessions were presented either at the OTCC education centre, or outreach locations at schools, camps, community centres, and festivals.

A number of these events were held in partnership with other organizations. An event to plant a pollinator garden took place at the OTCC Education Centre on June 16, in partnership with local Pathfinders, Sparks and Brownie groups. This initiative played a role in the City of Selwyn being designated as a "Bee City" by Bee City Canada. The OTCC presented a total of six workshops at Camp Kawartha throughout July and August, while two events were held in conjunction with

the Otonabee Region Conservation Authority, one at Curve Lake on May 23, and one at Beavermead park on July 7. Events were also run in partnership with the Riverview Park and Zoo in May and June. OTCC presented at a special Partners in Protection Event at the Royal Ontario Museum April 7 and 8. In addition to schools, and the organizations listed above, workshops were presented to Colleges and Universities, Girl Guides, Cubs and Beavers, Junior Field Naturalists, at Forest and Water Festivals, Eco/Earth Day events, and at our own special events.



Feedback from participants on the workshops and events has been overwhelmingly positive, and as the graph attached in Appendix A illustrates, the program is also effective in meeting its objectives. All participants have indicated an increase in knowledge of Ontario's turtles and wetlands, and all of them have been inspired to take action as a result of attending the sessions. Some testimonials from workshop participants are attached in Appendix B.

2. Project Partnerships

Many organizations have been involved in project delivery and have added to the geographical and demographic reach, as well as the impact of the programs. Project Partners have included: the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board, Riverview Park and Zoo, Otonabee Region Conservation Authority, Camp Kawartha, Adopt-a-Pond Program of the Toronto Zoo, Kawartha Conservation, and Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority. In addition to these project partners, we have developed a new partnership with Trent Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge and Science (TRACKS) at Trent University to share indigenous stories and traditional knowledge on turtles, integrated with science based learning, to program participants.

3. Hatchling Release Event

On June 15th, OTCC teamed up with Kawartha Land Trust (KLT) to release more than two dozen snapping turtle hatchlings back to the wild in the wetlands alongside the Stony Lake Trail network. The turtles were hatched last fall from eggs recovered from a female snapping turtle that was injured near Stony Lake Trails, and brought to OTCC for treatment. OTCC and KLT staff, board, volunteers and interested citizens of all ages attended the release. This year's hatchlings are currently being overwintered at the Centre. In spring 2019, we will once again invite the public to join us in the release of a clutch of head-started hatchlings back to their home wetland range.

4. Volunteers and Community Involvement

In keeping with the increased number of admissions of turtles to the Trauma Centre, community and volunteer involvement has more than doubled in just two years. Throughout 2018, we have involved 662 volunteers in the work of OTCC, who collectively donated over 6500 hours of time and mileage costs worth an estimated \$134,380. There are over forty active volunteers who care for the turtles, and hundreds of others who serve as turtle “taxi drivers.” Many of these volunteers directly dedicate time to our education and outreach initiatives by assisting in the workshops and presentations, providing communications, graphics and administrative support, providing care, feeding and tank cleaning for the non-releasable education turtles, and assisting with maintenance of the Outdoor Education Centre.



5. Communications and Promotions

OTCC’s education brochure was updated and re-printed in October. The brochure outlines the three options for in-depth workshops and presentations including 1) field trips for groups and classes to the OTCC education centre; 2) off-site outreach sessions; and 3) presentations via Skype. The brochure is being distributed at outlets throughout the Peterborough/Kawartha region and beyond, including to schools in the Peterborough area. Education events are regularly profiled on OTCC’s Facebook page which has 11,161 followers, and a reach of 30,000–40,000. Word of mouth from delighted participants continues to be a powerful form of promotion, with many of our requests to attend community groups, host field trips and visit schools, coming from referrals.

6. Provide Educational Resources and Support Stewardship Action

Educators, community group leaders, and participants in all sessions were provided with a brochure that includes a guide to Ontario’s 8 at-risk turtle species and their role in wetland ecosystems.



Participants were also provided with a fact card on how to safely and knowledgeably move turtles, and brochures on citizen science and road ecology opportunities with our partner organizations. All youth participating in our educational programs were provided with a button to remind them of their visit and newly acquired turtle knowledge.

7. Upgrade Web Site

As outlined in the project application, OTCC has begun the development of a mechanism to track public stewardship via OTCC's web site. A survey page to track stewardship initiatives, the turtle species found, and location information (including road mortality hotspots etc.) is currently being developed and will be tested over the winter months, with a view to it being publicly launched in the spring/summer of 2019.



Conservation education content has been added to the web site, including information on turtle nests and nest protection.

C. Complementary Programs and Projects

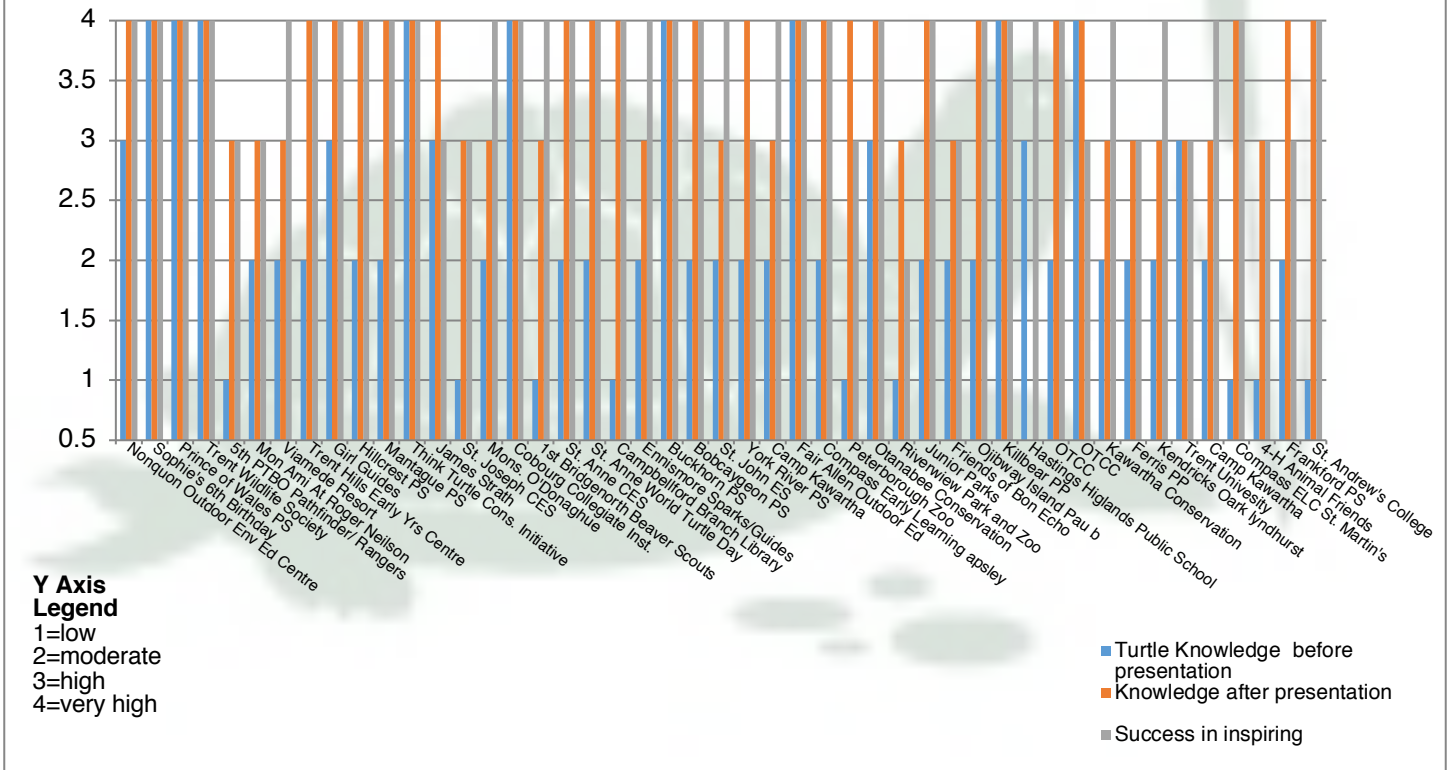
The increased level of demand experienced at the Trauma Centre in 2017, has continued into the 2018 season. This year the OTCC hospital has reduced mortality of adult turtles from injuries through the treatment of over 940 turtles. Since the admissions this season have been exceptionally high, the number of eggs collected from gravid (egg-carrying) females admitted to the hospital was correspondingly high, and over 4000 eggs were incubated. Over 700 hatchlings that were "head-started" or overwintered from the previous year were released back into their source wetlands in 2018 to replenish declining populations.

D. Summary

The funds provided by OWF in 2018 have been allocated and spent as proposed on education staffing and supplies. This comprehensive Educational Outreach Project has made an enormous impact this year, providing over 14,000 community members of all ages with the knowledge and tools to become active stewards of Ontario's turtles and wetlands through in-depth workshops, resources and on-line support. Thousands more were introduced to turtle conservation through displays, festival events and media. We value our continued partnership with the Ontario Wildlife Foundation in a shared goal to incrementally down-list and ultimately de-list Ontario's at-risk turtle species as soon as possible.

Appendix A

Education Survey Results 2018



Appendix B

What teachers have expressed about our education program:

Question asked:

Your opinion is very important to the OTCC.

Has our education presentation increased your sense of connectedness with the natural world, interest in wetlands, and concern for Ontario’s native turtle species?

Teacher	School	Grade(s)
Shauna Moodie	Monsignor O’Donoghue E.S.	1-8
<p><i>The OTCC presentation at our school really helped to raise the awareness of the students about the different species of turtles in Ontario, their habitats and their habits. With this increased awareness and knowledge; the students will undoubtedly be more inclined to protect their wetland habitats and to mitigate the threats to their existence in future.</i></p> <p><i>Thanks for a great presentation! The kids were very engaged. It’s not easy to keep a group of kids interested in something for 90 minutes! Well done! There were four classes in each presentation, which is approximately 100 students in two groups, so 200 in totals. Thanks again, Shauna.</i></p>		

Teacher	School	Grade(s)
Angela Cranney	St. Anne	1-8
<p><i>What an awesome presentation! Our students learned so much about the importance of wetlands and the need to learn about and protect our native turtles. Thanks for including live turtles during your presentation. They were a big hit!</i></p>		

Teacher	School	Grade(s)
Kristy Hill	Buckhorn P.S.	1-8
<p><i>The presentation was filled with important turtle conservation information (that children learn and understand) that connected to the curriculum, and seeing the live turtles, and comparing them to each other was fascinating for both students and adults. Thank you.</i></p>		

Jenn Hambleton	Compass Early Learning	Kindergarten-6
<p><i>Great program! Information age appropriate but also info for the caregivers. Very clear when speaking and used lots of “props” to keep the young children interested. Patient and engaging-great job!</i></p> <p><i>*lots of visuals to look at!</i></p>		

Patrick Muldoon	Hillcrest P.S.	2 -6-7
<p><i>As a teacher, it is very important to inspire kids to be connected to our natural world. This presentation certainly did this today! Thanks!</i></p>		

Tara Menzies	Prince of Wales P.S. at OTCC	4-6
<p><i>Absolutely, our group was fascinated to see & learn about different turtle’s and how we can help. We will be recommending you to other groups. Thank you</i></p>		

Stacy Higgins	St. John Elementary S.	1-8
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Educating the students about habitat loss and how this has impacted ecosystems and the species that live in them! Information about reproduction time is vital. Great job!!

What people are saying about our education program:

Contact	Event description	Participants
Alexis Cooke	UOIT Summer Educational Camps	Turtle Island

Your presentation brought-to-life all the concerns of turtles and their environment.. The campers were very engaged and it inspired a new generation to be stewards of our environment! Amazing!!

Shawna Telford	1 st . Bridgenorth Beavers/Scouts	5-7 years
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Yes it is! It is a great eye opener to let people know about the details it takes to save the population of our turtles. I believe the children will have a lot more knowledge and respect for our turtles and where to go to save a injured turtle.

Susan Monteith	Biodiversity Day at OTCC	Ennismore Sparks/Guides
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We found your program very informative and hands on. The girls/parents/leaders gained a great insight and will spread the word and importance of spread the word of “turtle safety” and how important it is to help the injured.

Julia Garro	Friends of Bon Echo	Campers
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OTCC’s presentation was inspiring! It was great to learn more about what the average person can do to help our wild turtle population!

Camp Counsellor	Camp Kawartha Education Centre	youth
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I have been to the centre and seen the presentation many times but I always learn more. Speaking for the kids I can honestly say absolutely! Inspiring and engaging!

Craig Brant	Camp Kawartha Environment Centre	Youth
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We run a very nature based program during our camps that you visited. This presentation gives the kids and staff a great deal of knowledge about turtles, wetlands and a conservation ethic in general. In addition, it inspires them with very practical steps they can use to help a turtle eg. When crossing a road and in a broader sense it inspires them and deepens their wish to make a difference for wildlife and nature. Our staff team always love the presentations and we always learn something new every time! Thanks so much for your wonderful visits this summer!

Kelly King	TRACKS Program	
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Youth

To see the turtles walking around while hearing Wendy speak about the importance of protecting wild turtles really drove the message home. It was such an exciting afternoon for our campers

and the questions were infinite! OTCC is an absolute wealth of knowledge and the positive impacts of the centre are felt across the province. We have a bunch of turtle lovers on our hands!

Rachelle Barrington Warsaw Caves Conservation Area ORCA Discovery Days

Meredith Carter

The personal stories of the ambassador turtles! Very impactful. Your presentation is a fantastic way to foster connections to local habitats and wildlife. We have had you out before and will again! It is highly relevant to the objectives of ORCA and is always well received by our park visitors and staff alike.

Camp Counsellor Camp Kawartha Day/Kinder Camp 3.5-5 years

Engaging the audience with the turtles (kids LOVED it) Presentation was very informative and educational. Great amount of “take-home-knowledge” for campers was easy enough for the kinder campers to understand. Great job!