



*Final Report to*  
**Ontario Wildlife Foundation**

*Submitted by*



**ONTARIO TURTLE CONSERVATION CENTRE**

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CHARITABLE REGISTRATION # 85752 4409 RR0001

*The Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre respectfully acknowledges that it is situated on the treaty and traditional territory of the Michi Saagiig Anishnaabeg. We offer our gratitude to the First Peoples for their care for, and teachings about, our earth and our relations.*

In 2020, Ontario Wildlife Foundation supported OTCC through a grant of \$5,000 for the Project: *Resources for Turtle and Wetland Conservation Education and Action*. The funding provided by the Foundation has been invaluable in enabling us to quickly shift to virtual workshops and videos, and to meet the demands of an unprecedented year at OTCC. The following provides an overview of the activities and accomplishments of the project.

## 1. Development and Distribution of On-Line Resources for Schools and Community Groups:

### *Virtual Field Trips and Workshops*

OTCC's education program moved to an on-line format in response to COVID-19 restrictions beginning in March 2020. For communities that have access to internet connectivity, we set up virtual workshops, and virtual field trips to the OTCC hospital. Despite the cancelling of in-person events, and the transition time to develop content and promote the on-line interactive workshops, our education program directly engaged 6592 participants in virtual field trips and workshops throughout the course of the project from July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021 (please see *Appendix A* for further information). While they don't take the place of meeting our education ambassador turtles in person, the on-line events have been highly acclaimed, and have had the positive effect of greatly expanding our geographical reach, enabling distant locations to connect with our conservation work. Please see *Appendix B* for testimonials from participants of the virtual tours.

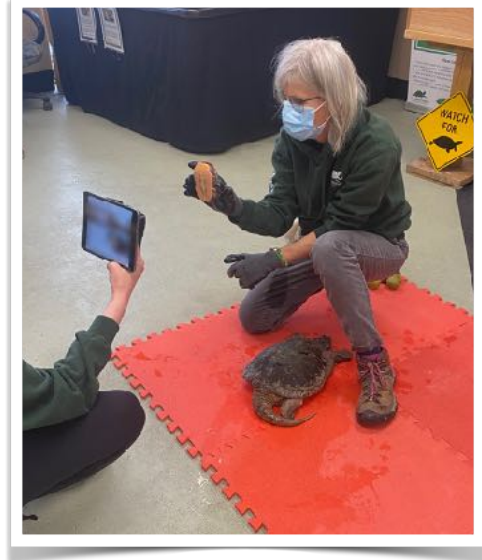


### *Turtle Time Video Series*

To complement the on-line tours and workshops, OTCC's Education Coordinator also introduced a series of videos entitled "*Turtle Time*" on a variety of turtle and wetland topics, including safely moving turtles from roads, egg laying, nesting and nest protection, and helping injured turtles. The videos have been launched on-line through our social media outlets such as Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/OntarioTurtleCC/>) and Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/ontarioturtlecc/>). Viewers were encouraged to submit questions to be answered, as well as suggestions of topics that they would like to see in future videos.

Throughout the course of the project, from July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021, 166,616 people have been reached with 29 videos. (Please see Appendix A for further information).

Given the response received to date, we are clearly satisfying an enormous demand for information on biodiversity, at-risk turtle species, and tips on how to take action to conserve our turtle populations. Instructions on safely moving snapping turtles has always been a frequently asked question, and our video on this topic has been extolled as the best available, going viral with 1,200,000 views within days. The videos have proven to be a valuable component of our outreach, and we plan to integrate them into our on-going programming as they are an excellent complement to our in-person sessions.



## 2. Development and Updating of Educational Resource Materials:

Our sessions were complemented with on-going support by phone, and e-mail, as well as complementary brochures and fact cards. A number of new educational resource materials



were developed throughout the year, which were distributed both in-print and on-line. In partnership with Kassie McKeown from Alderville First Nation, currently working with Turtle Island Conservation (TIC) at the Toronto Zoo, and with support from Ganawenim Meshkiki, we published a brochure on Turtle Connections to First Nations Culture, which provides a brief overview of traditional knowledge of turtles and conservation. In response to frequent

requests, we have developed a new brochure and banner on Eco-passages and How the Public Can Become Involved. The brochure was developed to introduce citizens to the concept of ecopassages, and to help them navigate the process of putting ecopassages in place in their communities. The brochure summarizes the basics of ecopassage structure and implementation, and will be valuable resource in enabling more of these projects to be undertaken. We also developed a brochure on Poaching, which explains the impact that the illegal collection of our native turtles is having on populations,





and provides tips on how to help remedy the situation, as well as a brochure on Nest Protection. A brochure on Phragmites and the impact the invasive wetland plant has on turtles was also produced. A booklet was designed specifically for kids, " My Turtle Booklet" that introduces Ontario's turtle species in a kid friendly format, and engages youth with quizzes and a word search. All of the brochures can be downloaded from the OTCC website, <https://ontarioturtle.ca/ourmission/brochures/>

### 3. Encourage and enable action, utilize wealth of data collected:

Importantly, this project targeted the root causes, inspiring and mobilizing youth as well as citizens of all ages to get involved in projects to develop eco-passages and signage at hot-spots, install nest protection when appropriate, and nest site naturalization, and become involved in wetland conservation. We are planning to build on these educational initiatives over the next year.

An important initiative of the previous year has been the tracking of stewardship actions through the distribution of our Conservation Actions pamphlet, and on-line survey to track stewardship actions via OTCC's web site (<https://ontarioturtle.ca/get-involved/report-your-conservation-actions/> ). Throughout this project we plan to put processes in place to follow up with submissions to our on-line conservation actions survey, and tabulate the results. This will help us to identify the SAR turtles affected and conserved, critical turtle habitat, and hot spots on our roadways, and to share it with appropriate government departments, agencies and conservation organizations. It also provides a feedback loop to evaluate program effectiveness and make continuous improvements.



### *Community Involvement and Volunteer Coordination*

It has been our observation that our education and outreach programming has had a direct impact on species at-risk. A virtuous cycle has begun through expansion of our education program – with more involvement came more hospital admissions, and the people that brought in injured turtles, became increasingly involved in other stewardship efforts. Following the launch of our extended education, outreach and communications program in 2016

(supported by OWF), our yearly admissions of injured turtles began to increase significantly, with admissions more than doubling by 2017 (900 turtles) and 2018 (940 turtles), and tripled by 2019 (1450 turtles), in relation to 2016 levels (394 turtles). In parallel, with an increased focus on direct engagement, our volunteer base also began to grow. Our volunteer numbers grew to 444 in 2017 from 275 in 2016. At present, we now have over 1000 volunteers that collectively contribute over 8000 hours of time. We involve the community in every aspect of our conservation work.



### Financial Summary


### Summary

The funding provided by the Ontario Wildlife Foundation to develop on-line education resources has been critical to the success of our educational outreach initiatives, particularly given the unprecedented challenges of the year. We are so pleased to have the Ontario Wildlife Foundation as a continued partner and supporter in conserving Ontario's at-risk turtle species and their wetland ecosystems.

## Appendix A

### Virtual Tours and Videos Participants

Virtual Tours/ Events (July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021)

Total Attendees: 6592

Students: 3659

Youth (under 20): 1752

Total Schools: 130

Turtle Time Videos and Social Media (July 1, 2020- June 30, 2021)

# of Education Program Posts: 29

Total Reached: 166,616

Total Engagements: 12,600

Shares: 6193

## Appendix B

### Testimonials from Participants

#### **Vincent Massey Public School**

*What part of the presentation/event had the greatest impact on how you think about turtles?*

"I feel the greatest impact of this presentation is seeing how the students are really engaged and highly interested when they see "real" animals up close, even though it was done virtual it still felt like the OTCC presenter was right in our classroom. I believe that the more students interact with nature the more willingly they will do their part to help and protect these animals. Kids need to feel connected and this presentation successfully does that."

#### **Brownies & Sparks Girl Guide Unit**

*What part of the presentation/event had the greatest impact on how you think about turtles?*

The passion of the presenters! All of the information was so interesting because of the way that it was presented. We loved seeing all of the different aspects of the program, hearing all about how you help turtles and ways that we can help too. We also loved seeing the turtles themselves!

*Has our education presentation increased your sense of connectedness with the natural world, your interest in wetlands, and your concern for the Species-at-Risk populations of Ontario's native turtles?*

Absolutely! At the following meeting a little over a week later we debriefed more with the girls and it was amazing to hear how much information they retained and how excited they still were about the presentation and about turtles!

#### **Cambridge & District Humane Society**

*What part of the presentation/event had the greatest impact on how you think about turtles?*

Building confidence in how to handle turtles properly and how to keep them comfortable while waiting to be picked up by a volunteer. I was very interested to learn how many species we have in Ontario.

## Appendix B (Continued)

### Testimonials from Participants

#### **Durham College**

*What part of the presentation/event had the greatest impact on how you think about turtles?*

The students were very taken by the presentation - it not only presented new information about wildlife rehab (the policies, procedures and multifaceted roles played by an organization) but helped them understand new applications for their skills & knowledge, and potential careers in the field of animal care. It was inspiring all round. Thank you!

*Has our education presentation increased your sense of connectedness with the natural world, your interest in wetlands, and your concern for the Species-at-Risk populations of Ontario's native turtles?*

Yes! This was a topic of much discussion following your virtual field trip - it made the issue real to the class.

#### **Virtual Elementary School at KPRDSB**

*What part of the presentation/event had the greatest impact on how you think about turtles?*

My students really enjoyed actually seeing live turtles while the presenter was speaking about them. Their favourite part was watching one of the turtles eat a strawberry. They spoke about that for the rest of the day.

*Has our education presentation increased your sense of connectedness with the natural world, your interest in wetlands, and your concern for the Species-at-Risk populations of Ontario's native turtles?*

This presentation has increased my students' sense of connectedness with the natural world, their interest in wetlands, and their concern for the Species-at-Risk populations of Ontario's native turtles. They were inspired to continue their learning by doing their own research on turtles that live close to their homes and figure out how they can help. My students are continuing to grow their love and respect for wildlife. I am very thankful to have this opportunity for my students to learn more and become more connected with the world around them.