

# TURTLE TIMES



Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre\*



Summer, 2020

## Message from the Executive and Medical Director

By Dr. Sue Carstairs



We headed into the busy season with the goal of balancing human health and conservation, and I feel this has been accomplished well. We were deemed an essential service and have not had an interruption in services for our hospital. All of our staff were maintained, and everyone pulled together to make our new policies work safely and efficiently; keeping people safe, while allowing us to still admit injured and ill turtles from across the province. I am very proud of how our team pulled together and how they without exception accepted this new reality, and made the very best of it!

Our summer staff have been amazing and we can't thank them enough for all their hard work! ...And of course our volunteers have been our 'rock'. Thank you, everyone!

While Covid-19 did keep people inside initially, our admission numbers were actually the same as 2019 until the heatwave struck. Once the heat really took hold, the turtles slowed down, as it was too hot for them to move about much during the daytime. This seems to have had a beneficial effect on numbers so far injured on the roads. (850 so far admitted to our hospital).

Our thousands of eggs, (we lost count at 4,000!) collected from females admitted to our hospital, have started hatching! Every day, more clutches start to hatch, and this part of the season starts our very 'happy-busy' time.

While our Education Programming had been diverted to a virtual experience since March, we are now cautiously restarting on-site programming, welcoming small family groups to come to the centre for pre-booked tours and learning experiences. (see below for details!)

*Newly hatched (and hatching!) turtles from clutches 20-C-386, 20-C-208, and 20-C-234.*



*Photos courtesy of Holly Astrom and Marilyn Hubley.*



*\*"Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre" is the legal operating name of the Kawartha Turtle Trauma Centre*  
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## Message from the Executive and Medical Director, continued

### We are delighted to share news on our expanding Veterinary Department!

While I have traditionally tackled the veterinary work on my own, it was clear this was becoming increasingly impossible due to the volume, and so it is with open arms that I welcome two veterinarians who have been helping us out in a huge way this season! Both are excellent turtle vets, and generally awesome people to work with!

### Welcome (back), Dr. Kristen Janke!



Kristen Janke, DVM, has been involved with the OTCC for a long time. Kristen comes from a biology background before becoming a vet, and has always had a passion for reptiles. As a veterinary student in 2014, Kristen took Dr. Sue Carstairs' Turtle Trauma course. After that she volunteered alongside the veterinary technicians at the centre to gain some hands-on experience. Kristen then became a First Responder, while at a veterinary practice near Guelph. As a first responder, she stabilizes injured turtles found in her area while they're waiting for a ride to the centre. Kristen has spent time at the centre each year, including completing a final-year rotation with Dr. Carstairs during veterinary school.

Kristen is currently a small animal veterinarian at a clinic in the Sarnia area. As well as being a First Responder in this area, this year we're fortunate to have Kristen at the centre for a few weeks. She has been taking on more and more of the veterinary work, and doing an amazing job. Going forward, she will be devoting even more time to the turtles, as she moves to Peterborough, and we couldn't be happier!

### And Welcome, Dr. Chris Dutton!

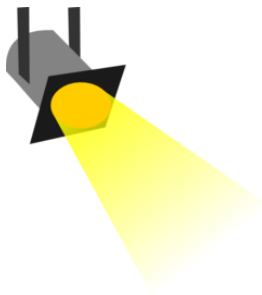
Chris is a veterinarian that has specialized in zoo and wildlife medicine for 25 years. This has included positions as Head Veterinarian at the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, in Jersey, UK, as a Resident in Zoological Medicine at the Saint Louis Zoo, Missouri, USA, and, for the last 17 years, as a veterinarian at the Toronto Zoo, culminating in being their Head of Veterinary Services.

In November 2019, he started his own Zoo and Wildlife Veterinary Consultancy company, and is currently working as an Avian & Exotic Animal Specialist Veterinarian at the Ontario Veterinary College, and as a Wildlife Veterinarian at the Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre, where he says he is extremely proud to be making a positive contribution to the native turtle populations of Ontario; he feels that this is truly one of the most satisfying highlights of his long career.

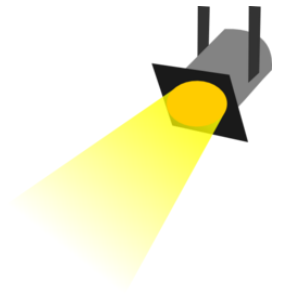


**Thank you, both Kristen and Chris: we are very lucky to have you both on our team; the turtles thank you too!**





# Volunteer Spotlight!



## Terry and Rob: Nest Protectors Extraordinaire!

Between the two of them, Terry Stark and Rob Steele have donated their time, and sometimes materials, to make more than 50 nest protectors for the Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre. We sell these protectors to individuals who have found turtles nests on their properties and want to protect them from predators. We sell them for \$25 – money that covers the material costs of the protectors and helps fund the important work done at the centre. Terry and Rob are both true turtle stewards and we can't thank them enough!

### Terry Stark



Terry has been involved at the OTCC for many years, but his passion for helping turtles started much longer ago than that! Terry describes watching and caring for turtles since he moved to the country in 1975. Then, in about 2000, he started monitoring and protecting turtle nests on his property. It was a natural fit that when the OTCC started offering nest protectors for sale to the public, that Terry would be involved in the process.

We've lost count of the number of protectors he's made for us, but he never disappoints. A phone call of "Hey Terry, we had someone call and ask for nine protectors, is there any chance you have some ready to go" was met with "I'll get them there tomorrow" (and he did!). Whatever the ask, Terry is always ready and willing to help, and we truly appreciate his dedication and generosity.

### Rob Steele

Rob is a retired firefighter who has volunteered countless hours at the OTCC. Starting as a turtle tank cleaner, Rob specialized in helping the big snapping turtles. Some readers may remember "Big Daddy\*," the largest snapping turtle the centre has ever had. Rob put his firefighting pipes to work helping Big Daddy with range of motion exercises as part of his rehabilitation, and was also involved in his release back to the wild.

Over the years, Rob has loaned his time and expertise to every type of project imaginable. Not only is he an Education Volunteer, he has also helped with designing and installing our outdoor turtle enclosures, mowing the lawn in the outdoor Education Centre, painting Unit 8 before we moved in, and renovating the first building at our new location. Of course, on top of all that, Rob is one of our expert nest protector creators. Thank you, Rob, for all your help over the years!



\*while we don't name the wild turtles temporarily in our care, some do insist on nicknames!

# News from our Education Coordinator

By Wendy Baggs, Education Coordinator

## Virtual Learning: Making Connections through Conservation Education with the OTCC

The Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre is committed to making our educational program accessible to all. We needed to find a way to make sure you could stay connected to turtles wherever you are, so now you can access these incredible animals on your computer or mobile device. The OTCC educational program links the wonders of turtles to large audiences across this big planet!

### Virtual Field Trips (Kindergarten & Higher)

Teachers can now bring the excitement of our Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre field trip to students, virtually! We offer a fun and engaging opportunity to keep students learning from wherever they are located. Programs are delivered by our skilled team of educators, are curriculum aligned, and focus on themes related to the conservation of Ontario's native turtles.

Our virtual Field Trips are available for community groups such as Cubs, Guides, Beavers, Provincial Parks, Cottagers Associations, Probus Clubs etc.

### Virtual Birthday Parties!

Now you can celebrate your birthday virtually with the OTCC. Meet our amazing turtle ambassadors, learn all about Ontario's turtles and how you can help! Join in with "Stunkly" the stinkpot turtle while he does his special dance just for you!! This party offers you the unique opportunity of having all your friends and family help celebrate your special day from the comfort and safety of their own home with just the click of a mouse!

Contact Wendy to book your unique experience now: [education@ontarioturtle.ca](mailto:education@ontarioturtle.ca)



### In-Person Tours

We're proud to be a resource for the community, to enable families to enjoy a day out with loved ones in a safe, educational environment. In July we began offering pre-booked private tours for groups of up to six individuals within their social circle. Contact Wendy to book your tour or to find out more: [education@ontarioturtle.ca](mailto:education@ontarioturtle.ca)



Follow us, as we take you on a journey behind the scenes, and learn with social media, by following OTCC's social media pages for turtle spotlights, educational updates and more!



[facebook.com/OntarioTurtleCC](https://facebook.com/OntarioTurtleCC)



[twitter.com/OntarioTurtleCC](https://twitter.com/OntarioTurtleCC)



[instagram.com/ontarioturtlecc](https://instagram.com/ontarioturtlecc)



# New Building Update

With thanks to Mary and Gerry Young, we now have a lot more turtle space! Starting with renovations of existing buildings on their property in the winter, we now have 3,000 additional square feet to house turtles in nice large tanks! The first building is totally renovated and has been full ever since, with a constant stream of turtles occupying the wonderful space. We are also using the front part of this building for physiotherapy. This dedicated physiotherapy space is just what the doctor ordered for our turtles receiving ongoing sessions!



The main room (left) in the first building now houses dozens of turtles, and the front room (right) provides dedicated physiotherapy space.



Special thanks to the Peterborough Zoo for donating these eight amazing picnic tables that will one day be used in our new Outdoor Education Centre.

The second pre-existing building is currently in the process of being renovated and should be completed shortly. This extra space has freed up so much room at our current location! Our vets, vet techs, and volunteers are all able to move around much more easily without having to worry about navigating around the turtles' enclosures. Thank you to all the businesses, volunteers, and especially to the Youngs for making our Turtle Centre dreams come true.

Stay tuned for more news in this area!!



Progress is being made quickly in renovating the second pre-existing building. Here, in-floor plumbing is being installed.



The exterior of the second building, with lots of big new turtle tanks outside, ready to be installed!



## Notes From the Field

Our dedicated field technicians are hard at work, tracking 19 juvenile Blanding's turtles at our field location. The start of our season was delayed slightly due to Covid-19, but as soon as we were permitted to enter our study area the crew was at it. Our study is quite unique in that we are following a group of juveniles that were hatched at OTCC, alongside a group of juveniles hatched in the wild at this same site. This allows us to truly see how 'our' turtles are doing in the wild – to make a long story short; they are doing great! We were able to find all 19 turtles at the beginning of the season – we are always relieved when all our turtles have survived the winter, and none of their transmitters have fallen off or stopped working! You can read more about our field team and the important work they're doing on our website. Go to [ontarioturtle.ca/news](https://ontarioturtle.ca/news) – many blogs have already been posted this season, with more to come.



Our hard-working 2020 field team, from left to right: April DeJong, Lisa Browning, Anna Kramer and Tyler Ambeau.

## Ways to Donate

The Donation Page on our website has been updated to more clearly define different ways that you can donate to the OTCC. Click on the [DONATE](#) button at the top of the home page to see what your options are.

### Donation Options

Ontario's turtles are counting on you – you can help!



[One-time Gift](#)



[Donate Monthly](#)

(use PayPal)



[Legacy Gifts and Gifts  
of Publicly Traded  
Securities](#)



[Corporate Matching  
Gifts Program](#)

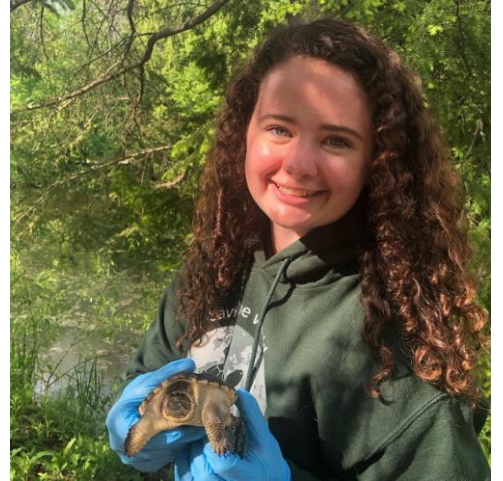


[Donating Equipment,  
Supplies, or Skills](#)



# Turtle Releases

Perhaps one of the most rewarding parts of being involved with the OTCC is getting to release turtles back to their native habitats. Each year, we release thousands of turtles back 'home' where they belong! All turtles that we return to the wild are released within one kilometre of where they were found, or in the case of hatchlings, to within one kilometre of where their mother was found. Whether it's a decades-old, 20-kilogram snapping turtle or a months-old, 20-gram painted turtle hatchling that was born at the centre, there's the feeling that the turtle "knows" it's going home. Thank you to our dedicated Turtle Taxi volunteers for sending us these great photos on top of all the hours of driving you do!



## Clockwise, from top left:

1. Drew Maxwell returning painted turtle 20-518 to Curve Lake. This adult female laid eight eggs during her one-month stay at the centre.
2. Blanding's turtle 20-494 is more than ready to go home!
3. Kelsey Scott releasing snapping turtle 19-1437. This hatchling turtle was found in a plastic bag on the roadside in October. Luckily two teenagers found him, and he stayed with us overwinter before being released in June.
4. Painted turtle 20-651 was brought in with animal bite marks on his shell. After he was given a clean bill of health he was returned to his home wetland.
5. Melissa Larsen releasing map turtle 19-874 after she stayed with us for about a year.
6. This painted hatchling's mother was treated at the OTCC after being hit by a car last July. The mother was released in September, and her offspring followed in June.
7. Ann Gronow releasing turtle 19-1432. This hatchling was found with a leg injury in October. It healed up over the winter and he was released in June.



*Photos courtesy of Drew Maxwell, Isa Knor, Vicky Scott, Melissa Larsen, Kelsey Scott, and Ann Gronow.*



# Turtle Releases, continued

We had so many amazing release photos to share, they wouldn't fit on just one page!



**Clockwise from top left:**

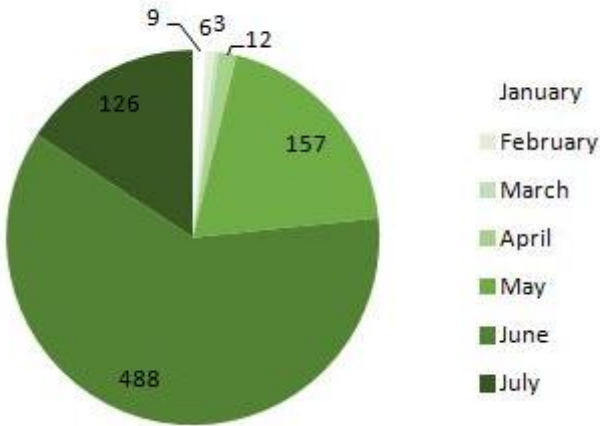
- 1. Painted turtle 19-1289 back home in Algonquin Park. This adult male was admitted late last season and received treatment over winter.
- 2. Painted turtle 20-039 returning home in May.
- 3. Sadly, this Blanding's turtle's mother was hit by a car and did not survive. However, because her body was brought to the OTCC we were able to harvest, incubate, hatch and release nine of her babies back to the wild.
- 4. & 5. Natalie and Emma Holdcroft releasing snapping turtle hatchlings. These little turtles were two of 34 in their clutch!



Photos courtesy of Drew Maxwell, Isa Knor, and Jess Holdcroft.

## OTCC By The Numbers

**Intakes Per Month**



As of August 7, 2020...

Approximate percentage of female turtles admitted that were gravid (have eggs): **60%**

**4000** Approximate number of eggs currently incubating at the centre.

Number of turtles released so far this year, including 850 hatchlings **1,062**





# The Hatchling Hub



In our last newsletter, we mentioned "tracking devices" but we didn't really tell you anything about them. That's because we want to tell you all about it during tracking season! In the summer, we hire a Field Crew as summer students to work at our field site to study Blanding's turtles, which are listed as Threatened in Ontario and Endangered in Canada. We follow a group of headstarted Blanding's turtles at a site that we keep secret, to prevent possible poaching.



## ***What does "headstarting" mean?***

Headstarted turtles are babies that were born here at the OTCC and therefore given a 'headstart' in life. We have been following a group of these headstarted turtles for 9 seasons now! It teaches us a lot about how, when and where to best release, as well as assuring us that headstarting helps conservation. We release thousands of headstarted babies each year, so this information is really important!



Blanding's turtles with transmitters on their shells



This turtle has been located, and will soon be weighed and measured as part of its monthly checkup.

## ***Do the students paddle around in canoes or swim underwater, hoping to come across one of these turtles?***

No! They'd never find them! Each turtle in the study has a very expensive little thing on its shell called a transmitter that sends out a radio signal. The transmitters weigh almost nothing and have batteries in them that last just over a year, so every year the transmitters must be replaced with new ones.

We track these turtles all summer to find out where they travel. We also put transmitters on a group of wild-hatched turtles of the same size, at the same location. This is so we can study how much they move around compared to the headstarted turtles, and find out if one group survives better than the other. We weigh and measure each turtle once per month. The rest of the time, they aren't disturbed 'Cause hey, they've become wild animals! And wild animals should be left alone as much as possible.

## ***How do we find that electrical signal sent from the transmitter?***

Good question! Our summer students have a receiver and an antenna. They hold the antenna up high and the receiver makes a beeping sound if it can "find" the transmitter. As they walk closer to the turtle, the beeps get louder and faster.



After school starts, most of the field crew go home. However, two people go out as late as October, so that we can learn about what the turtles do when it gets cold. When the turtles stop moving around, we know it's time for everyone to call it quits for the season. That means they've found a place to hibernate, so there isn't much more for us to do.

However, our work is not over! Everything the students do during the season is written down – this data is very important! It helps us to learn and understand what we need to do to help turtle populations grow. We not only help the turtles in Ontario, our data is shared around the world, so that other countries can learn from our studies.

**It's a pretty cool summer job, don't you think? Who knows, maybe someday you'll be one of our field students!**