

Conservation as Tradition

Indigenous people have been practicing conservation since time immemorial. Pre-colonialization Indigenous conservation practices in Canada included sustainable harvesting and hunting as well as prescribed burning.

These conservation practices came as a result of understanding that all things are interconnected. Spending time on the land allows for understanding balance in biodiversity which instills a greater appreciation of – and connectedness to – the environment.

Through careful observation and living close to nature, changes are more readily noticed in the environment.



Indigenous conservation practices developed as a result of appreciating the interconnectedness of all things.

The interconnectedness of nature is illustrated by turtles' critical role in the maintenance of healthy water and watersheds. As turtle populations decrease, changes in wetland health are evident, ultimately affecting larger bodies of water and other species who live there.



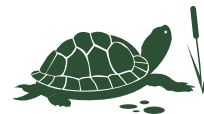
If you find an injured turtle,
call us immediately!

705-741-5000

This brochure was produced in collaboration with
Kassie McKeown, Alderville First Nation
Funding provided by Ganawenim Meshkiki
(Eastern Georgian Bay Initiative)

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Front cover art by Bernice Gordon, courtesy of Toronto Zoo



ONTARIO TURTLE
CONSERVATION CENTRE

4-1434 Chemong Rd.,
Selwyn, ON K9J 6X2

www.ontarioturtle.ca

info@ontarioturtle.ca

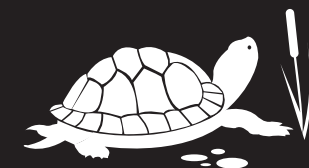
705-741-5000



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

*The legal name of OTCC is the Kawartha Turtle Trauma Centre.
Charitable Registration # 85752 4409 RR0001*

Turtle Connections to First Nations Culture



ONTARIO TURTLE
CONSERVATION CENTRE

Turtles hold a special place in First Nations legends and emphasize the importance of the turtle to Indigenous beliefs

Turtle Island

Indigenous people call North America “turtle island” because legend describes this land as being situated on the back of a turtle. The creation story describes a flood where the turtle gives his shell for the land to grow on until all can inhabit it. This turtle is believed to be a snapping turtle, as they are the largest, and are often found with algae and other plant material growing on their shells. Like the photo below, they sometimes look like a moving island.

In Southern Ontario, archaeological studies have unearthed turtle shells, turtle shakers and other artifacts depicting turtles. The cultural importance of the turtle cannot be understated in the current day as well.



Photo: Timothy C. Roth, Task Force Turtle

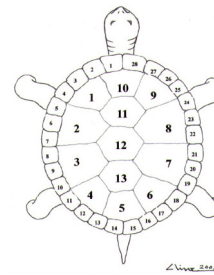
Turtle Clan

First Nations clan systems and teachings encompass thousands of years of knowledge and vary from one community to the next. Depending on the clan animal, each clan holds different traditional roles. The turtle clan is one of the oldest and those who belong are often recognized as teachers.

13 Moons on the Turtle’s Back

Although we usually count 12 months in a year, technically the moon travels around the earth 13 times within that year. This allows for 13 lunar months, each approximately 28 days long. Many First Nations people believe that these 13 lunar cycles are depicted on turtles’ shells.

The centre of the upper shell (carapace) has a pattern of 13 larger scutes which represent the 13 moons of the lunar calendar. The circle of smaller scutes that surround the edge of the shell add up to 28, depicting the number of days in a lunar cycle.



Each cycle or moon has a name that has a cultural teaching which explains the cycle of life and nature. In this respect the turtle is viewed as a timekeeper.

Photo: Joe Crowley



Image courtesy of Toronto Zoo



The Turtle with the Sun Under its Chin

Some Indigenous people call the Blanding’s turtle “the turtle with the sun under its chin.” Can you guess why?

In First Nations storytelling, the Blanding’s turtle was given his yellow chin when he returned the sun to the sky. He saved the sun by keeping it in his mouth, and a bright yellow shine could be seen under his chin.