

TURTLE TIMES



Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre*



DECEMBER 2021

Winter Hours:

Monday to Friday 9 - 5

Saturday 9 - 3

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* Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre is the operating name of the Kawartha Turtle Trauma Centre



OTCC Hospital

Teamwork is what it's all about!

by Dr. Sue Carstairs, Executive and Medical Director

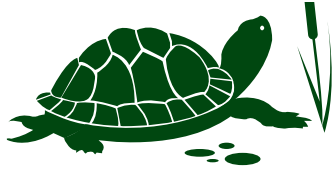
A very long season draws to a close. The mild weather resulted in turtles continuing to travel far later than usual, and we had hospital admissions into November! We are still tallying totals, but we know there were more than 1500 admissions, and around 5,000 eggs (which are STILL hatching!).

How does OTCC manage to admit this number of turtles, from all across the province? ... teamwork! We have the most amazing team, both within our centre and far beyond!



It all starts with our hotline staff who coordinate the phone calls that come in; both general concerns and questions, as well as specific requests about injured turtles. On average, each turtle admitted generates 3 calls; one by the member of the public who found the injured turtle, one by the hotline staff to a first responder to arrange care, and one back to the 'finder' to arrange transfer there. That's 4500 calls just arranging initial care! In addition, we receive thousands of calls about nesting turtles, hatchlings, and countless other turtle-related issues, to which we respond and provide advice. In addition to the calls, an email will also be sent out to our 1,000 Turtle Taxi volunteers, to alert them that a turtle needs a ride. These Turtle Taxi volunteers donate their time, (and gas!) to get turtles to OTCC from across Ontario.

Continued on page 2



ONTARIO TURTLE CONSERVATION CENTRE

*Home of the Kawartha Turtle
Trauma Centre*

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web: www.ontarioturtle.ca
e-mail: info@ontarioturtle.ca



OTCC's mission is to protect and conserve Ontario's at-risk native turtles and their wetland habitats. The Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre is Canada's leading dedicated turtle rehabilitation and conservation centre.

Ontario Turtle Conservation
Centre is the operating name of
Kawartha Turtle Trauma Centre
Registered Charity
85752 4409 RR0001

TURTLE TIMES is published for the members and supporters of the Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre

Your Donations At Work!

OTCC Hospital

Continued from page 1

Our 40 First Responders (veterinarians donating their time and skills, with OTCC support) located throughout the province, will start treatment in the meantime, to make sure the turtle gets immediate care. Yet another call will be needed, to arrange an admission time to OTCC. (Since there can be up to 50 admissions in a day, we need to make sure these are scheduled throughout the day!).

...So much work just getting the turtle in the OTCC doors! Once at OTCC, our Veterinary Team springs into action, to ensure each turtle gets the very best care. We have 4 experienced turtle veterinarians, who carry out the surgeries and initial treatments. The turtles are then cared for by our Veterinary Technician team, and our Husbandry team. Our Husbandry team consists of 35 volunteers overseen by our Volunteer Coordinator.



Photo Above: Map turtle, after repair at the OTCC hospital

Wow! That's a lot of coordination! We are also happy to work with every other rehabilitation centre in the province, and to act as a referral centre for turtles in their care, if needed. Since most centres are very busy with other species, and most do not have a veterinary team on staff, we admit about 300 cases from other centres, each season. We are fortunate to have a full and experienced veterinary staff, and to be the only turtle hospital in Canada accredited by the College of Veterinarians of Ontario. This puts us in an excellent position to help others.

To our whole Team, from the turtles of Ontario – a resounding THANK YOU!! We couldn't do what we do without you, and together we are having a positive impact on turtle populations.

Of course, as a Registered Charity, none of this would be possible without our donors and supporters, who enable our Team to function! Thank you!!



Above: one of 5,000 eggs incubated at OTCC, just recently hatched!



A favourite activity of our staff and volunteers is to return rehabilitated adult turtles home, and hatchlings to their mother's source wetlands. Photos on this page show a few of the many releases from the spring of 2021.

Capital Campaign Update

Our Capital Campaign to raise funds to build our own facility, is almost at its goal! The beautiful rural property, generously provided by Mary and Gerry Young, is shown in the photo at the bottom of the page. This 100 acre farm in Peterborough will serve as an oasis for conservation and education. We have already renovated two of the existing buildings, and our vision for the new facility is shown in the top photo below. The new facility will be a 10,000 square foot building to house a much expanded Education Area, Hospital and Hatchling Facility. It will allow much greater access by the public, and will become a venue “Where Community and Conservation Connect”.

Please contact us at info@ontarioturtle.ca to become a part of our Capital Campaign, or donate online at <https://ontarioturtle.ca>. Some naming opportunities are still available!

Together we can do even more, to help Ontario’s turtles and the habitat in which they live.

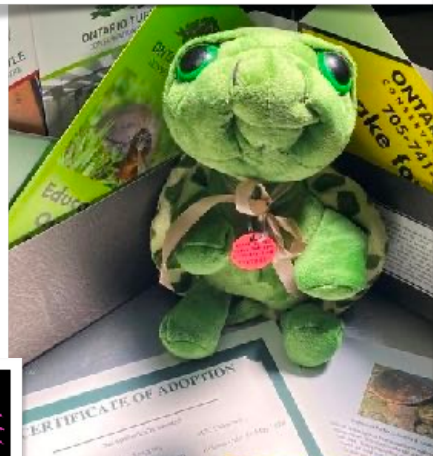


Photo above, artist's rendering of new facility, and Photo right, aerial view of the property including newly renovated buildings on Television Road



Shop the OTCC Store!

There's a unique gift for everyone on your list!



Shop our extensive collection of turtle merchandise. Many of the items are available on-line at <https://ontarioturtle.ca/shop/>, or call 705-741-5000 for more information. 100% of the proceeds from all sales goes towards the conservation of Ontario's Turtles.

Notes from the Field

by April DeJong, Field Team Coordinator

Our field studies complement and augment the work that we carry out at the Centre. Although the main goal of the study is to determine the effectiveness of head-starting as a conservation strategy, it has many collateral benefits as well! To date we have found that the turtles in the study are doing very well, and that our head-started turtles have comparable behaviour and survival to their wild-hatched counterparts. This is great news indeed, since we incubate, hatch and release a LOT of babies! (about 5,000 eggs a year are incubated). We are following a group of head-started juvenile Blanding's turtles alongside a group of wild-hatched juveniles of similar size. This allows us to directly compare the head-started turtles' 'success' to those hatched in the wild. While in the field, the team also conducts population surveys, at a site that hasn't previously been surveyed. We also note other species observed, and compile this for use by the Parks officials, to help with their park conservation planning.

Every year, from May to October our field team can be found waist deep in wetlands using radio telemetry to find the location of 29 juvenile Blanding's turtles. This season marked our 10th season of the field study, and it was a great season indeed!

The field team also catch any turtles they come across, and take morphometric measurements of

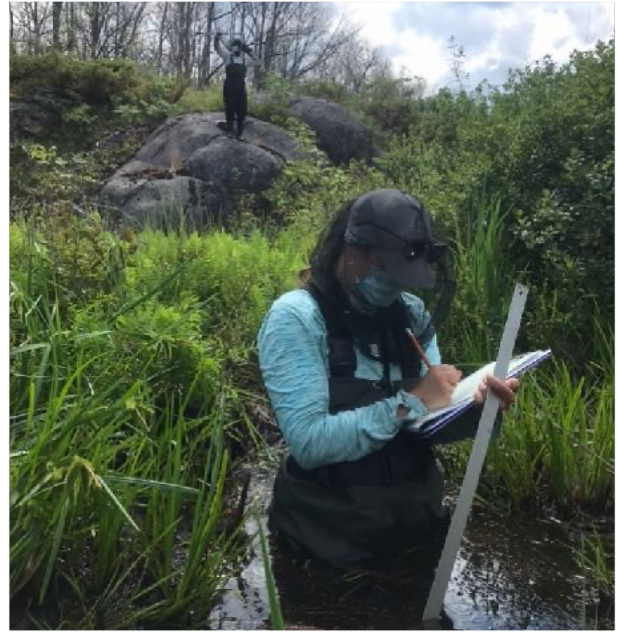


Photo Above: Two of our field technicians, Marc and Maureen, hard at work!

Photo Below: Study turtle 033 peaking out from the organics.



them in order to better understand turtle populations within the area. This season our field team processed: 30 Eastern Musk turtles, 25 Blanding's turtles, 41 Midland painted turtles and 17 Common snapping turtles.

Aside from finding turtles by hand, the field team also sets hoop net traps to find turtles.

These traps are similar to minnow traps and are baited with sardines. This season 128 traps were set, and 21 turtles were captured. The turtles only spend a short time in the traps after getting a free meal! They are released right away, after we have had a chance to note their species, sex and size.

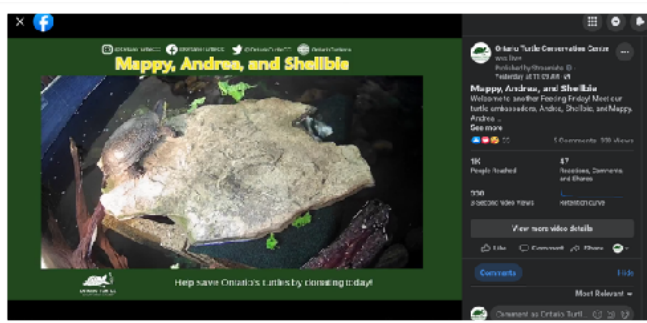


Education and Outreach: The Year in Review

by Wendy Baggs, Education Program Coordinator

2021 has had its share of ups and downs but OTCC's education program has not missed a beat! Our education program has been crushing it with our *Live Streaming Events*, *Behind the Scenes Virtual Tours*, our *Turtle Trek Adventure Workshops* and our ever popular private tours, aptly entitled *Turtle Encounters*. All of our sessions are complemented by our extensive array of brochures and fact cards. To date in 2021, the education program has reached over 8300 individuals, with over half being students!

Our live-streaming internet webcam focuses on OTCC's education turtle ambassadors and can be viewed on platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitch. We began using our streaming technology on September 15, and now offer viewing four times weekly. Our reach via Facebook is in excess of 40,570. These streaming events are targeted to public audiences, however they also provide interesting viewing for educational groups as well.



Through OTCC's *Behind the Scenes Virtual Tours*, teachers can take their students on cyber field trips, and facilitate inquiry based activities, including research projects. Our virtual tours give the students an inside look at the centre and



provide a novel way of visiting OTCC without ever leaving the classroom! They are customized for students of all age groups, and have been utilized by college and university students for their studies on chelonian behaviour and ecology. We are already booking well into 2022 for our virtual tours!

In parallel to the on-line presentations and videos, when Ontario entered Level 3 of re-opening last summer, we piloted a new in-person program entitled "*Turtle Trek Adventure*." *Turtle Trek Adventure* is a 1.5 hour program, and was offered in the summer and fall in the OTCC outdoor education centre. It was presented to one small group at a time, outside only, with social distancing in place. In the first hour, the participants met OTCC's non-releasable education ambassador turtles, and learned about turtles' biological characteristics, their vital role in our life-sustaining wetland ecosystems and the many threats to at-risk populations. Importantly, we inspire participants to get involved in conservation. There is an opportunity for questions and answers before heading to the Activity Centre for some turtle-related crafts, games and activities for the remaining time.

Thanks to support from *TD Friends of the Environment Fund* and *The Elsa Wild Animal Appeal of Canada*, look for *Turtle Trek Adventure Workshops* to be integrated into our programming on a regular basis.

Our private in-person tours or *Turtle Encounters* as we like to call them, also launched again on July 6th due to the lessening of Covid restrictions.

Many enthusiastic supporters of conservation discover that OTCC has much to offer with a personalized tour. The tour begins in the education area, where similar to our other sessions, attendees learn about Ontario's eight native turtle species, why they are listed as a species at risk federally, and how they can help! As always, our non-releasable education turtle ambassadors are the stars of the show, and with their help, all participants leave with a wealth of knowledge related to our freshwater, web-footed, shelled friends. The small group of 6 enjoys having the facility to themselves on this 1 hour guided experience, with no crowds to dodge! A private tour is the most interactive way to meet and learn about Ontario's turtles.



Education on wildlife and habitat conservation is important! Participants learn the importance of biodiversity and living sustainably. Connecting people to nature inspires them to conserve it, and they often influence others around them to become more environmentally conscious as well!

If you're interested in booking an event or tour or would like a copy of the education brochure, please e-mail Wendy at education@ontarioturtle.ca or contact her at 705-741-5000. Guests are reminded to bring masks, which will need to be worn indoors and when physical distancing is a challenge. For entry to the OTCC a vaccine passport must be presented.



Our Volunteer Community Connection

by Isa Knor, Volunteer Coordinator



Our volunteers are the backbone of the work we do here at the OTCC. They travel all across the province, transporting turtles to and from the centre, to ensure they get the help they need! We currently have 45 active volunteers who come in weekly to take on the tough and never ending job of cleaning and feeding the thousands of turtles we have in care. This year we were pleased to be able to have an outdoor, physically distanced volunteer event, and we also went to the Volunteer fair at Trent University. This was such a nicely paced reintroduction to social gatherings, and much needed! The community of volunteers within the OTCC are an amazing group of people. Part of what makes our volunteer community so great is having the opportunity to

socialize with like minded people while volunteering. Unfortunately, the pandemic took away a big portion of that fun. Being back at a volunteer fair and conversing with students who are so passionate about conservation, the environment, and Ontario's turtles was not only refreshing, it helped to bolster our depleted email lists. We're feeling re-energized with a number of volunteers now on waitlists for specific shifts! We've also been able to once again partner with a number of different community groups and organizations. A few of the many we partner with include:

- Alternatives Community Program Services Peterborough
- Canadian Conservation Corps & Canadian Wildlife Federation
- Durham College's Animal Care Program
- Eco Canada
- Fleming College's Fish & Wildlife Program and Recreation & Leisure Program
- Ocean Wise
- Trent University's Conservation Biology, School of the Environment, and Environmental Education Programs

Together these organizations have contributed thousands of hours of volunteer work to help us achieve our goals. It has been quite some time since we were able to safely allow more people into the centre in a controlled way, and we sure missed having them here with us! They add so much value and bring exciting new ideas. They also foster stewardship in their own communities by sharing what they have learned here, and by advocating for turtles across the province, country, and internationally!

We're always looking for new volunteers for turtle taxi, cleaning, and feeding, and our education program! If you're interested in joining OTCC's community of volunteers please send an email to volunteer@ontarioturtle.ca for more information and an application form.

Volunteer roles include:

Turtle Taxi:

Our Turtle Taxi Volunteers enable turtles from all over Ontario to receive life-saving treatment and care! We take in 1500 injured turtles from across the province each year. Volunteers help to drive injured turtles to the OTCC, and long-distance trips often involve multiple drivers. If you don't live in the Peterborough area, here is a way to help us in our work!

How it works: Your name and email address will be added to our turtle taxi driver email list. The people on this list receive emails about turtles needing rides. You only need to respond when you are available to do the drive! Turtles will be transported in enclosed containers - drivers do not need to handle the animals directly. You do not need to have any experience with turtles to apply, but must have access to a vehicle. Our volunteer taxi drivers generously donate their time (and gas)!

Turtle Care:

Turtle Care volunteers help with the ongoing care of injured turtles that are in rehabilitation at our centre. Our turtle patients can spend up to a year in care as they recover from their injuries. To take part, you must be at least 18 years old, and be able to commit to one 3.5 hour shift per week for a minimum of three months.

Feeders: Our turtles require a specialized diet to keep them healthy (and their injuries healing) while at the OTCC. We rely on our wonderful Feeder volunteers to ensure that each turtle gets

an appropriate balance of nutrients in their diet. Our Feeders provide different combinations of live worms, frozen fish, pellets, and leafy greens to our turtles!

Cleaners: Turtles are wonderful animals, but they can create quite the mess in their tanks! We are so grateful to our Cleaning volunteers for draining, scrubbing, and refilling turtle tanks. It takes great attention to detail to make sure that water levels are just right, basking platforms are stationed properly, and that the turtle will be encouraged to heal by living in a clean temporary home while staying at our centre.



Education and Outreach:

Our Education and Outreach volunteers spread awareness and knowledge of Ontario's turtle species and the habitats in which they live. This team connects the great work of the OTCC with the public, arming them with the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions and to become wildlife stewards. OTCC is looking for Outreach volunteers to help educate the public on the plight of Ontario turtles. Full training will be provided. These positions require that volunteers be comfortable with public speaking and commit to one event per month. Interested candidates will be interviewed and must give a short 5-minute presentation on a wildlife issue of their choice.



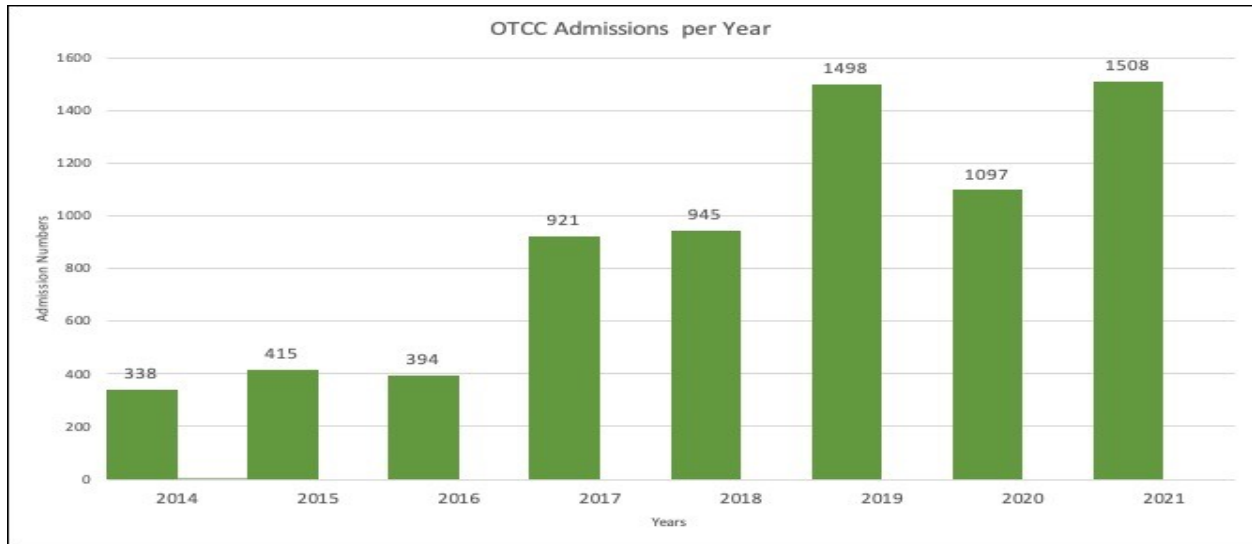
OTCC By the Numbers 2021

Admissions **1508**

Releases **2250**

Hatchlings **2065**

Eggs **4991**



This past year saw a record number of hospital admissions, as we continued to navigate through these challenging and unprecedented times. Please consider making a donation so we can continue our vital work to protect and conserve our at-risk turtle populations. Donations can be made on-line at <https://ontarioturtle.ca/donation-options/>

Yes, I want to support the OTCC!

☐ \$500 ☐ \$250 ☐ \$150 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$50 ☐ Surprise us _____

☐ Please find enclosed my **cheque**, or ☐ Please charge my **credit card**:
(payable to Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre)

Card # _____ Expiry ____ / ____ CVV _____

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Please complete if your contact information has changed:

Name: _____ Street: _____

City: _____ Province: _____ Postal Code: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____



One of many turtles that went home this year because of your help!

4-1434 Chemong Rd Selwyn ON K9J 6X2

705-741-5000

info@ontarioturtle.ca

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