

# TURTLE TIMES



Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre



Fall/Winter 2022

## Message from the Executive and Medical Director

By Dr. Sue Carstairs

As the 2022 season finally winds down, a huge THANK YOU to all of our Team, both on- site and off, for their amazing work in enabling us to admit over 1800 turtles to our hospital this season!



From the Good Samaritans who found the injured or ill turtles and called our Hotline, to the Turtle Taxi Drivers who helped to transport the turtles from anywhere in Ontario, to the First Responders who helped to get those turtles immediate care, and then to the OTCC Staff who ensured that the turtles received the ongoing surgery and nursing they needed. You are all amazing!

In addition to our hospital admissions, we collected and incubated almost 8,000 eggs from 7 different species of Ontario's turtles - These are still hatching as of writing this!

...And an equally huge THANK YOU to our supporters, who make all this possible. As a registered charity, we couldn't carry out our vital conservation work without their help.

With about 2,000 releases carried out in 2022, the logistics of all the comings and goings can get very complicated, and yet our Team manages it all with calmness and professionalism, and always with a sense of humour. I am extremely proud of each one of them, for their passion and dedication.



The highlight of this year has to be reaching the stage of site development for our new conservation centre and hospital "**Where Community and Conservation Connect**" (see depiction at left by Wilk Associates Landscape Architecture Ltd). They will be breaking ground imminently! It's a race against the weather at this point, but we hope to have it completed for next season!

Our Capital Campaign is still ongoing, but we have raised funds so far to enable our dream to come true, and for construction to commence. We still hope to raise additional funds, however, to enable it to reach its full potential. Visit [ontarioturtle.ca/donate](https://ontarioturtle.ca/donate) to find all the different ways to help.



I know you'll be excited to hear all that has been going on this season, so read on to learn about our programs and all they have accomplished this season!

With Sincere Appreciation,  
Sue

Above: Artistic rendition of OTCC's new centre, by Ray McNeice

## Summer 2022: A View from the Surgery Suite

*By Dr. Kristen Janke, OTCC Veterinarian*

This year was a year like no other in the hospital at OTCC! We opened our doors to more injured and sick native turtles than we have ever seen before. With over 1800 adult/injured turtles arriving for care, our veterinary staff worked 7 days a week to tend to the medical needs of our patients.

OTCC is lucky to have 4 regular veterinarians, as well as veterinary technicians, animal husbandry technicians, and a rotation of veterinary students who come to learn and provide care through the summer. We treat a range of injuries from embedded fishhooks and predator/dog attacks, to shell, limb and jaw fractures on unfortunate turtles who are struck by cars, boats, or lawnmowers.



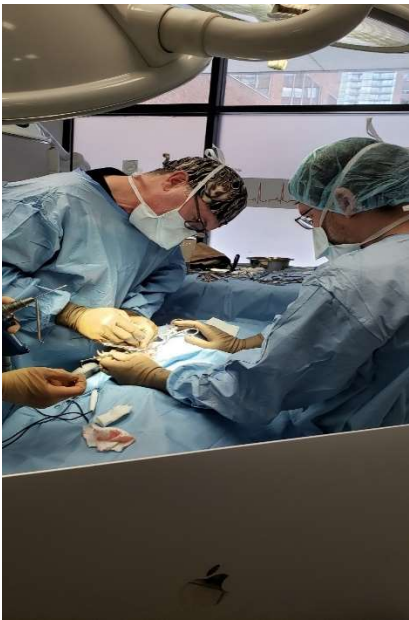
Above: One of OTCC's 4 regular veterinarians does an eye exam on an old, sick snapping turtle patient. This fella is now eating well and gaining weight!

Our veterinarians assess and treat every single turtle, and technicians provide intensive care during the critical time shortly after a serious injury, sometimes treating over 100 turtles in one day! Much of the vets' time is spent in the surgery suite, carefully putting broken shells back together with wiring techniques, repairing fractured jaws, and closing wounds. We are proud to say we released 1900 turtles back into the wild this year!

Every female turtle was x-rayed, and eggs were recovered and incubated. Through the fall we have hatched around 2800 hatchlings and they, along with hundreds of adult turtles who need more time to heal, will be cared for and assessed regularly by our medical staff over winter. Some turtles require physiotherapy, additional procedures, or help gaining weight and strength prior to release.

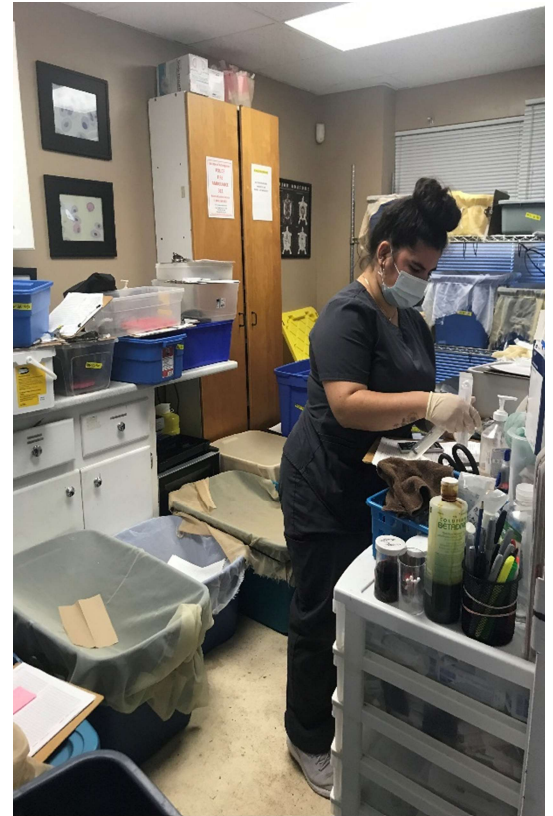
We love watching the progress our patients make and marking them with a 'release' tag when they are ready to go – **it's why we do what we do!**





Some of our patients require a specialist, to carry out very specialized surgery. *The turtle on the left* is having orthopedic surgery to repair his leg. This is a snapping turtle, and they need to be able to travel many kilometers on land, so they need to have full function of all limbs. The surgery is being carried out by Dr. Brendon Ringwood at the Veterinary Emergency Clinic and Referral Centre, in Toronto. A huge thank you to Dr. Ringwood for donating his services – another turtle will be able to go ‘home’ as a result!

Our ICU is hopping all season, with up to 60 admissions a day! On the right, you can see our summer technician student, Kaitlin, busy with the triaging of the new admissions



Left: an x-ray of a turtle reveals many eggs- we make sure none of these are lost, and recover each one so they can be incubated, hatched and then released back to the mother’s wetland. Almost 8,000 were incubated!



Above left: a newly hatched clutch of snapping turtles, gets ready to be moved to one of our hatchling rooms (above right).



## RELEASES!

**THESE ARE A FEW OF THE 2,000 RELEASES WE DID IN 2022!**

All of these turtles became vital additions to their populations, thanks to all who helped...









# FIELD WORK: Our 11<sup>th</sup> Season!!!

*By April DeJong, Field Work Coordinator and Technician*

From May 2nd to October 26th, 2022, our field program's 11th field season was underway!

Our field work is adding to knowledge about 'headstarting' and showing that the release of babies hatched in captivity is a viable conservation strategy in its own right. Our long term project is following a group of headstarted juvenile Blanding's turtles, alongside a group of wild-hatched juveniles of the same size. We are comparing their behaviour, survival, and growth, to show that our headstarted turtles are doing just great out there!

Our field team trekked through dense vegetation, climbed up rocky inclines, waded through thick wetlands and tiptoed through deep water to locate our 38 study turtles!

During the field season our team uses radio telemetry to locate our study turtles on a weekly basis. Once found, the location and habitat the turtles are residing in is recorded. Every 4 weeks our team weighs and measures the study turtles, and to check on their overall well-being.

Up until this point all of the head-starts released at the study site have been "hard released". Hard release means that the head-starts went straight from captivity out into the wild. This season our team released 10 "soft released" head-starts at the study site. Soft release means that the head-starts went from captivity, out into a fenced in outdoor enclosure for 6 weeks, and then out into the wild. In doing this we allow the juveniles to become familiar with environmental variables such as weather, sounds and smells, prior to being released. We are interested in comparing the data from our hard released head-starts and soft released head-starts to see if one release strategy works better than the other!

Our field team also takes "morphometric measurements" (weights and measurements) of any turtles they come across, to better understand turtle populations within the area. This allows us also to evaluate populations in this area that hasn't been surveyed before. This season our team processed: 18 Eastern Musk turtles, 36 Blanding's turtles, 41 Midland painted turtles and 21 Common snapping turtles.

Aside from capturing turtles by hand, the field team also sets hoop net traps to find wild turtles. These traps are similar to minnow traps and are baited with sardines. This season 88 traps were set, and 29 turtles were captured. The turtles get a free meal with the traps, and are only held a very short time, before being released again. It is a very useful tool for conservation efforts, to find out the local population health and number.





Above: Our field work is a lot of fun, but also very hard work! Tracking the turtles requires moving about in very challenging conditions!



Above: Study turtle T031 basking on a nice summer day

## THE SCOOP ON OUR EDUCATION PROGRAMS

*By Lisa Browning, OTCC Education Coordinator*

With restrictions lifted over the province, we had a busy season of in-person tours this summer. While virtual tours were a hit for educators in the winter and spring, the summer saw a huge demand for in-person visits. We were able to offer onsite Turtle Encounters and Turtle Treks for families and small groups; some having driven hours just to see the OTCC!

Providing a mix of in-person and virtual options has allowed us to reach a variety of audiences, including schools located in Northern Ontario through our Connected North partnership.





So far, we have educated over 11,000 people through our tours and workshops this year, surpassing our goal of 8,000 people. These tours have taught people about Species at Risk turtles in Ontario and how to be stewards in protecting them.

We have collaborated with partner groups such as Kawartha Land Trust to release a clutch of Northern Map turtle hatchlings on one of their properties, and with Canadian Conservation Corps to build turtle nest protectors during a workshop with youth.

We have attended events both virtually and in-person such as the PVNCCDSB and KPRDSB Environmental Symposium, Durham Children's Water Festival, Campbellford Fair, Peterborough Exhibition Market, and the Riverview Park and Zoo. In the fall we finished planting a pollinator garden in our outdoor education area, with help from volunteers, staff, and the students at Sage and Sunshine School of Cultural Learning.

We're looking forward to further building our education program by offering short 30-minute modules based on curriculum topics, and continuing to spread awareness on turtle conservation. After all, Education is the basis of conservation!





# OTCC TURTLE TAXI PROGRAM AND HOTLINE WERE SIZZLING THIS SEASON!

By Kate O'Day, Hotline Coordinator

The OTCC's Hotline can almost be called Ontario's "turtle 911", helping with a variety of turtle emergencies, concerns, questions, and consultations. Many calls required the team to work with the turtle's finder trying to positively manage the outcome for an injured turtle, or to help prevent injury altogether! 2022 was especially busy, with hundreds of calls a day during peak months. The team was always on the move trying to give time and care to every case that popped up.

During peak season the hotline team constantly worked at solving transport puzzles of getting injured turtles (or eggs) to the closest turtle First Responder for care, getting them into the OTCC, and then hopefully arranging their journey home after they have healed or hatched.

A turtle's journey to the OTCC comes from the assistance of many Turtle Taxi volunteers, from all over Ontario. With more than 1870 admissions over the year, sometimes with more than 60 a day, it is an incredible group effort to get them all in and sorted.



Above: April is seen picking up a turtle flown from Chatsworth by Wayne on his Cessna.

Right: Wayne's plane with the decals of the three charities he flies for!

It is estimated this year alone Turtle Taxi drivers put in 1,795 hours of driving time and 15,700 km of distance to transport injured turtles and 1,091 hours and 90,000 km to get turtles back to their homes and released. This is the equivalent of driving across Canada (from Vancouver to Cape Breton Island) 39 times or around the world roughly 6 times. Some of the furthest journeys took volunteers North to Kenora and Dryden, with the longest trips being 20+ hours, and some adventures crossed borders into Quebec and up the St. Lawrence River.

Many trips got creative, and turtles traveled not only by car but by ferry, canoe, and an assortment of different planes - some commercial and some smaller kindly flown by private owners.



We are excited to see what collaboration and teamwork will come with next season, and we are amazed and thankful by the efforts this year.



# THE OTCC VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

*By Isa Prophet, OTCC Volunteer Coordinator*

Our volunteers are amazing. They travel across the province, transporting turtles to the centre, to ensure they get the help they need, clean the turtle enclosures, feed the turtles, and do so many more things at the centre. We currently have 55 active volunteers who come in weekly to take on the tough and never-ending job of cleaning and feeding the turtles. We also currently have over 150 on-call volunteers that help fill in when needed. This is a 20% increase of weekly volunteers from the previous year! However, we would love to have more! If you're interested in volunteering with us, send us an email at [volunteer@ontarioturtle.ca](mailto:volunteer@ontarioturtle.ca) and we'll send along more information on our different volunteer roles. Our volunteers come from diverse backgrounds and no experience is necessary to start – just a willingness to learn and a positive attitude! Volunteering your time at the centre truly contributes to the conservation of Ontario's turtles, who have so many odds stacked against them.



This year we have had approximately 7500 volunteer hours done in house – which is around 20 hours per day! There is no way our small team would be able to keep up with so many turtles without this help and we so deeply appreciate it!

On the left: One of our volunteers cleaning some of our largest turtles in care – the Snapping turtles!

During the winter its time to reflect, catch up on things, and get ready for our next summer season. This winter we are caring over 3000 injured turtles and their hatchlings! So, slowing down as the turtles do in the wild, and hibernating/bruminating isn't an option for us. We stay busy all year round! Many people ask if we hibernate the turtles during the winter. The short answer is: No! We don't hibernate them because if we did, they wouldn't be growing and healing. They need heat and the sun (which we use UV and heat bulbs for) to be able to metabolize their food and put that energy into healing wounds, getting stronger, and growing!

Below: Some of the many turtles overwintering with us and healing!





# OBSERVATIONS FROM A NEW OTCC TEAM MEMBER

By Tracey Murfin, OTCC Grant Manager

I started my journey at the OTCC in June when I began to volunteer feeding turtles. I soon learned the term “turtle twister” as we navigated the many bins of turtles on the floor underneath the overflowing shelves of turtles. It was an interesting time to be introduced to the workings of the centre! The busiest time of the season, in the busiest year to date with over 1800 injured turtles admitted. The three hours a week I was there I witnessed a hive of activity. It didn’t seem to matter what role a person had as everyone jumped in to do what needed to be done. The passion was and is contagious! Turtles were fed and cleaned, and their medical needs were addressed and when an egg was discovered or a turtle hatched, there were oohs and ahhs (maybe that was just me).

While I had been officially retired, I noticed the posting for Grant Manager and I couldn’t resist; this fitted well with my past work experiences, and my turtle passion! In October I was fortunate to be hired as the new Grant Manager which now allows me to be involved at another level (although I am not giving up my three hours volunteering feeding the turtles). In the past couple of months, I have been attempting to learn everything I possibly can about the work the centre does as well as conservation of Ontario’s at-risk turtles and their wetlands. I am discovering quickly that this may take a while! The staff at OTCC have been generous with their time and knowledge and eager to share their passion for turtles! In my initial conversations with the staff, I asked what they wanted the world (and for my role – particularly funders) to know. The message was loud and clear.

*“Every single turtle matters”*

I am looking forward to doing my part in getting this message out to the community and our present and future funders so we can continue to do the important work that we do!

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**FROM THE WHOLE ‘TURTLE TEAM’ – THANK YOU TO ALL OUR SUPPORTERS WHO MAKE OUR VITAL CONSERVATION WORK POSSIBLE.**

***HERE ARE EVEN MORE WAYS TO HELP....***

## Yes, I want to support the OTCC’s Conservation Programs!

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City: \_\_\_\_\_ Province: \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre**

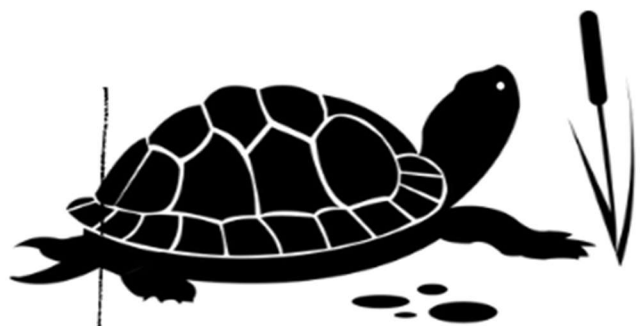
4-1434 Chemong Rd Selwyn ON K9J 6X2

705-741-5000

info@ontarioturtle.ca

[www.ontarioturtle.ca](http://www.ontarioturtle.ca)





# GIFT GIVING GUIDE

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volume 1  
December  
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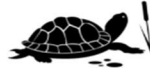
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