

Town of Erin Species at Risk: Snapping Turtle



Snapping turtles' prehistoric appearance makes them unmistakable. Most of us have probably seen them crossing a road in spring or summer.

Description: Snappers are Ontario's largest turtle. The shell is normally between 8 and 18 1/2 inches long and ranges in color from dark brown to tan and can even be black. As it grows, the shell often becomes covered with mud and algae. The tail has sharp ridges running along its length, and is nearly as long as the shell.

Habitat: Snapping turtles use a wide variety of habitats, but their preference is for slow-moving water with a soft mud or sand bottom and abundant aquatic vegetation. They may inhabit surprisingly small wetlands, ponds and ditches. They hibernate in the mud or silt on the bottom of lakes and rivers, usually not far from shore.

Threats: Snapping turtles are long-lived (up to 70 years), and they reproduce slowly – females do not start to lay eggs until they are 17-19 years old. In addition, very few of their eggs (about 1 in 1,400) survive to adulthood. As a result, the loss of even a few adult turtles every year is enough to cause populations to decline, and this makes snapping turtle populations very vulnerable to threats such as road mortality, pollution, hunting and poaching.

Status: The snapping turtle is currently listed as Special Concern under the Ontario Endangered Species Act.

What can you do? Females are drawn to roadside gravelly surfaces to lay their eggs so reducing road mortality is very important. Slow down when driving near wetland areas and if you see one attempting to cross a road, when it is safe to do so, carefully help it cross in the direction it is travelling. Nesting turtles should never be moved.

If your property is home to snapping turtles, then avoid or use caution when applying any lawn or agricultural chemicals as they reduce hatching success.

Until very recently, it was still legal to hunt snapping turtles in Ontario. However, in an April 2017 decision, Ontario's Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry decided to end the hunt. The decision was made in response to overwhelming public input against the hunt, and show that peoples' voices can affect the fate of Species at Risk. The hunt was likely a contributing factor to the state of turtles in the province, however continuing actions are necessary to address the other serious threats.

SARs in the Town of Erin

Birds

Barn Swallow
Chimney Swift
Common Nighthawk

Mammals

Little Brown Bat
Small-footed Bat
Northern Long-eared Bat

Reptiles and Amphibians

Jefferson Salamander
Milk Snake



Flora

Butternut
American Chestnut
Ginseng

Insects

Rusty-patched Bumblebee

What is ESAC?

ESAC is the Environment and Sustainability Advisory Committee of Council for the Town of Erin. Our mission is to provide sound environmental advice to our Council, develop partnerships with neighbours, businesses and the community, communicate important environmental issues, and help make Erin a sustainable, climate-change-ready, and environmentally progressive community.



For more about ESAC or to join ESAC contact:

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Snapping Turtle

Species at Risk



Did you know that here in the Town of Erin there are many species at risk (SAR)? They are not the “stars” of the natural world, but are populations of grassland, woodland and wetland creatures that were once plentiful but are now threatened by habitat loss and other factors. How can we help? First, get to know what these threatened species are, then learn what actions might help them flourish again.

