



Ottawa RIVERKEEPER®  
SENTINELLE Outaouais

# Turtles At Risk

Almost all the turtles in the Ottawa River are at risk of extinction. You can help recover these species by helping protect habitat and looking out for turtles on the road.



Photo: David Finlayson

*The snapping turtle is one of seven turtles at risk along the Ottawa River.*

All turtle species in the Ottawa River are at risk of disappearing from our watershed, with the exception of the painted turtle. Although turtles are often spotted along our riverbanks, populations have dropped significantly in the past few decades due mainly to habitat loss. The wetlands that turtles depend on have been stripped away and replaced by farms, roads, and residential subdivisions.

Because of their lifestyle, turtles are particularly vulnerable to development. Turtles have a very long lifespan and can take over 20 years to reach maturity. Therefore adult death has a major impact on these species. Turtles also travel overland in the summer months to reach nesting sites, so they often get hit by cars or poached for food or the pet trade.

**You can help** by looking out for turtles on the road or in the water. Get involved in your community to protect remaining turtle habitat. Turtles contribute to biodiversity in the Ottawa River and even help keep our water clean by scavenging dead animals. Helping turtles means keeping our water drinkable, swimmable, and fishable!

## Did you know?

Even in Canada, turtle and turtle eggs are still served as a delicacy in some restaurants.

*Defending the Ottawa River. Protecting our Communities.  
À la défense de la rivière des Outaouais. Pour la protection de nos communautés.*



# Turtles at risk in the Ottawa River Watershed

7 of 8 turtles species in the Ottawa River are listed as at risk provincially and federally under the *Species at Risk Act*.

At risk in:

Ontario  
Quebec



Photo: Ontario Nature

## Eastern Musk Turtle

*Sternotherus odoratus*

Age: up to 50 yrs



Named for the musky odour it produces when disturbed, this turtle rarely leaves the water.



Photo: Ontario Nature

## Spotted Turtle

*Clemmys guttata*

Age: up to 50 yrs



The spotted turtle loves to hangout in bogs and marshes that are disappearing along the Ottawa River.



Photo: Ontario Nature

## Northern Map Turtle

*Graptemys geographica*

Age: up to 30 yrs



If you look close enough, this turtle's shell resembles the contour lines on a map.



Photo: Ontario Nature

## Blanding's Turtle

*Emydoidea blandingii*

Age: Over 75 yrs!



This turtle has a distinctive dome shaped shell that resembles an army helmet. Unlike other turtles, it is a poor swimmer.

## SNAPPING TURTLE

*Chelydra serpentina*

Age: up to 100 yrs!



The snapping turtle is the largest fresh water species in Canada! It spends so much time underwater that algae grows on its shell, which helps it blend in with its surroundings. Female snapping turtles are often visible during the summer along the Ottawa River when they are searching for gravelly or sandy nesting spots.



Photo: MNR



Photo: Ontario Nature

## SPINY SOFTSHELL

*Apalone spinifera*

Age: up to 50 yrs



This large turtle has a soft leathery shell and a pointy snout. It rarely leaves the water, and only a small population remains at the mouth of the Ottawa River. Clean water is essential for its survival.

## WOOD TURTLE

*Glyptemys insculpta*

Age: up to 40 yrs



This turtle gets its name from the woods it inhabits along the Ottawa River. However, the wood turtle has almost disappeared from our watershed because of habitat loss and poaching. These turtles are often taken from the wild to be sold in pet stores.



Photo: MNR

## How You Can Help Turtles

- ✓ Don't disturb nests, young or adults. Observe turtles from a distance.
- ✓ Look out for turtles on the road and move them off the road when possible.
- ✓ Never order turtle from a restaurant. If you're thinking about buying a turtle as a pet, request documentation about the supplier to ensure they are not wild.
- ✓ Get involved in your community to help protect remaining wetlands! You can even start on your own property by preserving vegetation and planting native plants.