

Conservation Award - Member: David Seburn



This award recognizes an outstanding contribution by a member in the cause of natural history conservation in the Ottawa Valley, with particular emphasis on activities within the Ottawa District.

This year David Seburn is the recipient of the Conservation Award – Member for his determination and contributions to the effort to ban the Snapping Turtle hunt in Ontario.

David Seburn spent 20 years as an independent amphibian and reptile ecologist, and is now the freshwater turtle specialist for the Canadian Wildlife Federation. He is a member of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Conservation Committee and chair of the Canadian Herpetological Society's conservation committee.

In 2012, David was awarded the Ottawa Field-Naturalists Club's award for Conservation for his significant efforts in turtle research and conservation in the Ottawa area. He was part of a group that unsuccessfully lobbied the Ontario government to ban the Snapping Turtle hunt at that time.

The Ontario government designated the Snapping Turtle as a Species at Risk, but held on to their position to retain the hunt. When the Ontario government opened comments on changes to the provincial hunting regulations in 2016, there was renewed interest in trying to end the hunt. David held his position that the hunt was not based on science and publicized the risks Snapping Turtles face, including habitat loss, persecution, and road kill. It can take 20 years or more for an individual turtle to mature, making it difficult for populations to rebound from losses. Adult females are particularly vulnerable to road kill during the nesting season when they are looking for places to lay their eggs. When females do successfully lay eggs, their nests are often raided by foxes, racoons and other predators.

David worked with many naturalist organizations, including our own Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club and Ontario Nature to engage and motivate others to ask the Ontario government to end the Snapping Turtle hunt. He helped keep the short-sightedness of the hunt in the news and on social media. The Ontario government received more than 11,000 comments calling for the end of the Snapping Turtle hunt, and in early 2017 the hunt was finally banned. The turtle is currently listed as a species of "Special Concern."

On their website, Ontario Nature acknowledges that, “It was a collaborative journey of dogged determination, fueled by letters to ministers, petitions, [reports](#), [opinion editorials](#), [action alerts](#), [blogs](#) and social media campaigns. When the going got tough, the fair and informed [coverage by the press](#) and by the [Environmental Commissioner of Ontario](#) helped immensely to buoy weary spirits and keep the issue in the public eye.”

David was a key player in the process. He used his powers of persuasion via the internet to keep the issue in the news. A brief search of the subject will give rise to several links describing his tenacious effort to keep the hunt in view.

It is for his promotion and advocacy to ban the hunting of Snapping Turtles in Ontario, that the OFNC is pleased to present David Seburn with the Conservation Award for a Member for 2017.

