



The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club

2016 Conservation Award - Non-member: City of Ottawa

The Conservation Award for a non-member is given in recognition of an outstanding contribution by a non-member in the cause of natural history conservation in the Ottawa Valley, with particular emphasis on activities within the Ottawa District.

This year the award goes to the City of Ottawa's planning and environmental engineering groups for their efforts to help hatchling Snapping Turtles make it safely to Mud Lake at the Britannia Conservation Area. Snapping Turtles are officially listed as a species at risk federally and provincially.

It has been known for quite some time that the hatchling snapping turtles were being killed on the road to the water filtration plant at the Britannia Conservation Area. Female Snapping Turtles emerge from the lake every June to lay their eggs. Although they may head in any direction, many travel north from the lake and lay their eggs in the gardens and open areas around the filtration plant. Every fall the eggs hatch and the tiny hatchlings head for the lake - or sometimes away from it.

While those hatchlings from nests close to the lake need travel only a few metres, others must cross the road to reach Mud Lake. Being hit by a car is always a danger, but much more problematical was the road's curb. Although the turtles could tumble down the curb and cross the road, they could not get up and over the curb on the other side by the lake and were trapped on the road.

The curb was only about 14 cm tall, but from the viewpoint of a 3-cm-long hatchling, it was an insurmountable cliff. Hatchlings could follow the curb and, maybe, find a gap, but this might be 25 m away. Many died from dehydration under the hot sun on the road - or were eaten.

The OFNC Conservation Committee began working with the city on this issue in early 2015, and a solution was put in place in autumn 2015. The city removed the vertical curbs along the south side of the road and replaced them with sloped curbs. The gradual slope means that hatchling Snapping Turtles can now cross the road and continue their trek to Mud Lake. During autumn 2016, hatchling turtles were observed using the new curbs to safely reach Mud Lake.

We applaud the City of Ottawa, working with the Britannia Water Purification Plant, for their quick response to this issue, which goes a long way to helping more of the at risk Snapping Turtles survive.

For their positive and speedy response to concerns regarding safety of Snapping Turtles at Britannia Conservation Area, the OFNC is honored to present the City of Ottawa's planning and environmental engineering groups with its Conservation Award for a non-member.

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