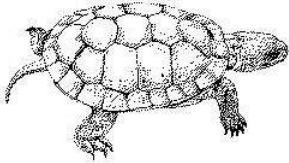


## 2023 Conservation Award—Non-member: Turtles of Old Ottawa East and South

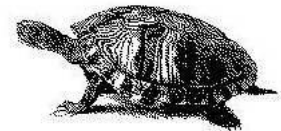
*In recognition of an outstanding contribution in the cause of natural history conservation in the Ottawa Valley.*



This year the award is presented to Turtles of Old Ottawa East and South for their innovative work in helping to preserve and protect turtles in Ottawa.

Canada has eight species of freshwater turtles, all of which are listed as Species at Risk by the Federal Government. Experts say this makes turtles one of the most at risk groups of wildlife in Canada. While protecting critical habitat for these creatures is paramount, there are other ways to help them. Turtle nests are exceptionally vulnerable to predation, and any turtles that do survive to emerge from the nest, must then navigate their way to the nearest body of water. A daunting task for such tiny creatures.

Putting into practice the mantra of ‘thinking globally but acting locally’, in 2021 a group of residents in the Brewer Park to Brantwood Park area along the Rideau River, banded together to help the turtles. Aware that many turtle nests were being destroyed by predators in this corridor, they built nest protectors to keep eggs safe from predation. A Facebook group (now at over 900 members) linked concerned people together. With so many looking out for turtle nesting sites, word spreads swiftly and volunteers are able to quickly install nest protectors.



Once nest protectors are installed, community members routinely check on them and remove tall plants shading the nest area. Too much shade can reduce the soil temperature and keep the eggs from hatching. In late summer once nests are starting to hatch, volunteers put up signs and write chalk messages on sidewalks to alert walkers and cyclists to keep an eye out for hatchlings that may be on the move, and possibly crossing sidewalks. If hatchlings are found wandering away from the river, they are carried down to the river and released close to water. In 2023 the group installed 40 nest protectors, thus helping ensure more eggs hatch, and the hatchlings make it to water, with a fighting chance of survival. This committed group is taking care of their neighbours – only this time their neighbours are Painted and Snapping Turtles.

This engaged and committed group saw a problem, developed a solution, and is helping to preserve local Species at Risk. They are an excellent example of community conservation at work. For their dedication to protecting local turtle populations, Turtles of Old Ottawa East and South is a worthy recipient of the OFNC's Conservation Non-Member Award for 2023.

