



# Habitat for Reptiles



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There has been an overwhelming decline of turtle and snake populations, both in Ontario and globally. Six of our eight native turtles in Ontario are listed on the Species at Risk in Ontario (SARO) list. Ontario snakes are also in decline with 11 of our 18 native snakes on the SARO list. These species are also on the Committee On the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) list.

The Thames River still maintains populations of a number of rare reptile species, even within the City of London. This presents a unique opportunity to both conserve these species and their habitat and educate communities on how to retain a piece of our natural heritage.

In 1994, the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) began to survey for the spiny softshell turtle along the Thames and Sydenham Rivers. Early on it was realized that research without stewardship was a losing battle. So, armed with a strong education program, a community stewardship and outreach program began. Working with property owners, special projects are being done to protect, create and maintain habitat.

The goal of the *Guide to Stewardship of the Spiny Softshell Turtle* is to encourage and advise landowner action. This 60-page booklet outlines the biology and ecology of the spiny softshell turtle and provides information on what landowners, land users and community members can do to be good stewards.

Each year, the UTRCA offers free traveling education programs that reach thousands of school children, community members and the scientific community.

Stewardship and research activities have included:

- An education and awareness program that assists community members whose property is home to species at risk.
- Opportunities to provide information through a “report your sightings” poster.
- Investigating the habitat and needs of the spotted turtle, spiny softshell turtle, Blanding’s turtle, northern map turtle, eastern hog-nosed snake and queen snake.
- Conducting a long-term queen snake and spiny softshell turtle mark and recapture program.
- Investigating micro-habitat use and selection combined with habitat protection and stewardship of these lands.
- Investigating the rate of turtle nest predation and options for long-term land stewardship to lessen these effects.
- Creating new nesting areas and protecting eggs from predators, in cooperation with landowners.
- Providing all relevant information to recovery teams and government agencies.

Major support has been provided by the Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk (Environment Canada), Endangered Species Recovery Fund (World Wildlife Fund), Species at Risk Stewardship Fund (Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources), the Ontario Trillium Foundation and The Salamander Foundation.



*It would appear that our Canadian friends are well ahead of us regarding turtle conservation. Not only are most of their native species protected now, but conservationists in Canada recognize the importance of public sector participation for long term species protection and management.*

Dave Lee, Tortoise Reserve (North Carolina),  
*Bulletin of the Chicago Herpetological Society*

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