



Spot a turtle on the road?
Here's how you can help it

Description

Join the Nature Conservancy of Canada's effort to protect turtles

May 18, 2022

Birds are singing, bees are buzzing, and turtles are laying eggs. This is the time of year when **turtles** embark on their long journey, sometimes covering several kilometres, to find an ideal nesting site. Being slow doesn't prevent them from covering long distances, however, the main problem is roads, as they obviously have no idea what a traffic light is and are unaware of the danger. Here's how the public can take steps to ensure the turtles' safety.



Blanding's turtle – Image: [Andrew C](#), [CC BY 2.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

The **Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC)** is encouraging drivers to be vigilant this spring, as turtles sometimes lay their eggs on road surfaces or attempt to cross roadways to find suitable habitats. And while their shells offer effective protection against predators, they're no match for a vehicle.

Over the past few years, NCC has helped introduce measures to protect turtles at strategic locations throughout the province identified through carapace.ca. Anyone who sees a turtle on their property or in the street is encouraged to report its presence on the website. These observations help conservation organizations such as NCC introduce protective measures for turtles across Quebec.

The number of annual turtle observations has increased steadily since carapace.ca launched in 2017. Nearly **2,000 turtle sightings** were reported to the site in 2021, bringing the total number of reports to **8,000**. Last year, the site even received its first recorded sighting of a **leatherback turtle**, the only marine turtle in Quebec.

There are [nine species of turtles in Quebec](#), all of which are at risk.

The **Montréal** and **Outaouais** regions of the province have the most sightings, followed by the **Laurentians** and **Eastern Townships**. Since some turtle species can be found across regions, the help of the public is of utmost importance in protecting them everywhere.

What to do if you see a turtle on the road

- Check to see whether it is safe to stop; your safety is the most important thing.
- Help the turtle cross the road in the direction it was going. Be careful, as some species like snapping turtles can cause serious bites.
- After helping the turtle, back away so as not to cause it too much stress and take a picture of it for recording on carapace.ca
- If you see an injured turtle contact the Éco-Nature rehabilitation centre immediately at sostortues@eco-nature.ca or 450 622-1020 ext. 286.

How to move a turtle



Common snapping turtle – Image: [Dakota L.](#), [CC BY-SA 3.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

For a turtle that can hide its head in its shell (e.g. a **Blanding's turtle** or a **painted turtle**), simply lift it gently with both hands (like holding a hamburger), supporting its plastron (the belly) and its back, and carry it across

the road. Carry it close to the ground to avoid hurting it if you accidentally drop it.

The technique is different for **snapping turtles**, which are large, grey and have heavy, spiny tails and the general looks of a dinosaur. Their massive, strong shell has “handles” at the back (on each side of its tail). Use those handles to lift the turtle’s back end, and walk it across the road while allowing it to lean on its front legs, wheelbarrow-style. Alternatively, you can slide it onto something you might have in your vehicle, such as a car mat or snow shovel, which will make it easier to move.

Never pick up a turtle by the tail, as this can cause damage to its internal organs.

Each turtle that dies in a traffic collision has a significant cascading effect on its entire species, as an individual can take up to 25 years to reproduce.

– Francisco Retamal Diaz, Project Coordinator, Nature Conservancy of Canada

Key facts

- Studies have shown that a mere five percent increase in annual mortality is enough to cause an entire turtle population to decline. Maintaining a given population size depends on the survival of the adults, especially females.
- The turtles most frequently reported on carapace.ca – snapping turtles (45 percent of observations) and painted turtles (41 percent) – are also the ones most often found injured or dead.

Acknowledgements

NCC would like to thank the Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs, as well as Resolute Forest Products for allowing it to implement concrete measures for the protection of turtles.

Feature image: Easter painted turtle, by [Greg Schechter](#), [CC BY 2.0](#), via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

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and restore more than 15 million hectares, including nearly 50,000 hectares in Quebec.

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Date Created

May 2022