



GEORGIAN BAY
BIOSPHERE
MNIDOO GAMII

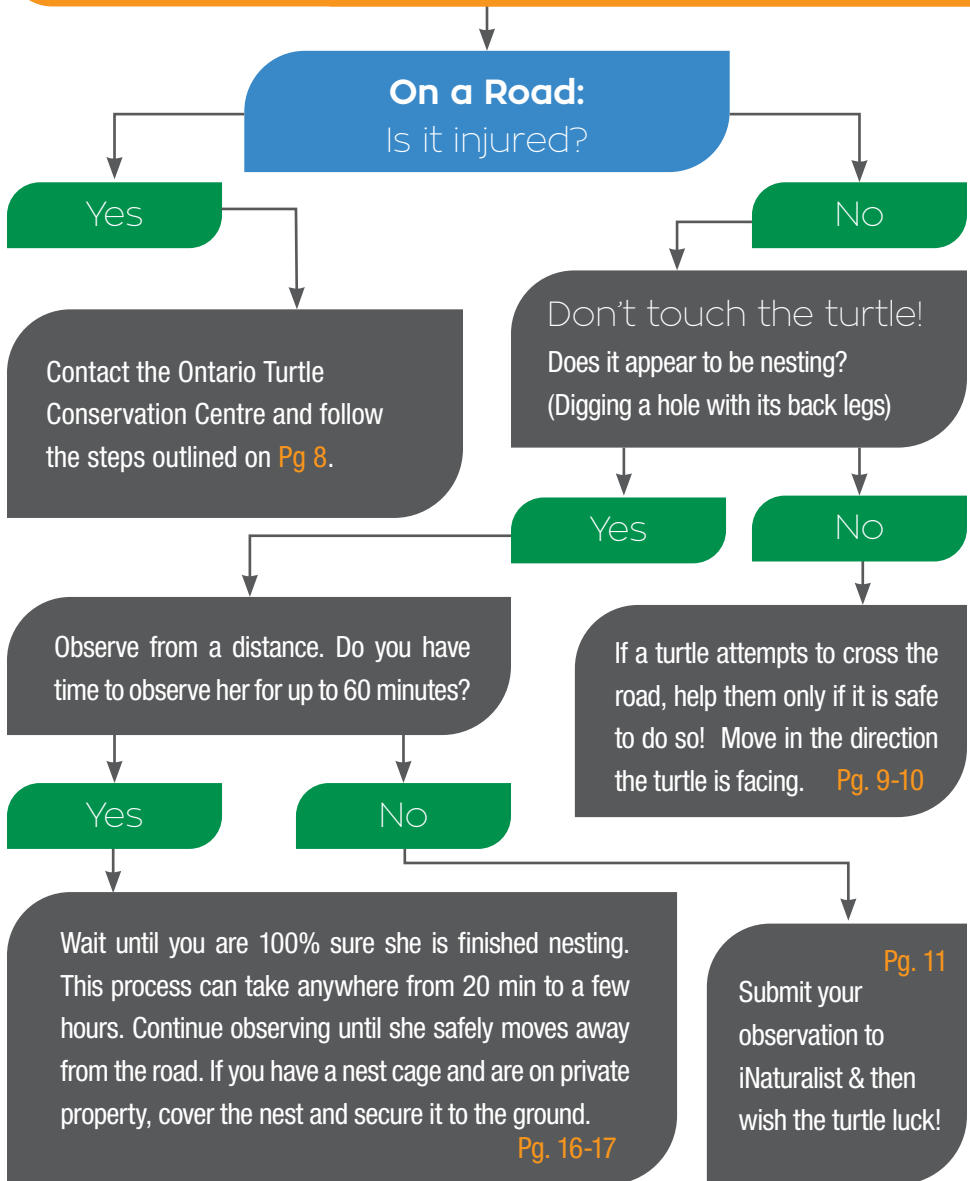
Turtles on Roads and in Waterways:



A HANDLING, REPORTING
AND PROTECTION GUIDE

I Found A Turtle!

Where did



Now What?

you find it?

Wetland, Lawn, or Garden:

Don't touch the turtle!

If it is not in immediate danger, just leave it be! It may be a female looking for nesting grounds or a male moving between wetlands. Turtles are surprisingly terrestrial! Submit sighting to iNaturalist.

Pg. 11

Boating:

Learn about boating around turtles.

Pg. 15

Dock:

Learn about turtles around docks.

Pg. 12

Fishing:

Did you hook a turtle?

Yes

Learn what to do with a hooked turtle.

Pg. 14

No

Submit your observation to iNaturalist & then wish the turtle luck!

Pg. 11

Land Acknowledgment

The Georgian Bay Biosphere recognizes that we are located on Anishinabek territory and acknowledges that our organization benefits from colonization, privilege, and the displacement of the original peoples of this territory. Parry Sound area is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples.

We respect and recognize the inherent rights and governance of the Anishinabek pre-confederation. GBB also acknowledges the rights of the Anishinabek as legally recognized in the Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850 and the Williams Treaty of 1923.

Turtles have long held significance to Indigenous cultures. Turtles are part of the local clan system, the shell holds a calendar system, and many variations of the creation story include Turtle Island (North America) being formed on the back of a turtle's shell. We work towards honouring those teachings through sharing of knowledge, relationship building, through respect and reciprocity, and caring for our non-human relations, like turtles.

While we still have much to learn and have work to do, the Biosphere is committed to our responsibility of relationship building with Indigenous Peoples, knowledges, and ways of being. We offer our gratitude to Indigenous peoples for their care for, and teachings about, Turtle Island.

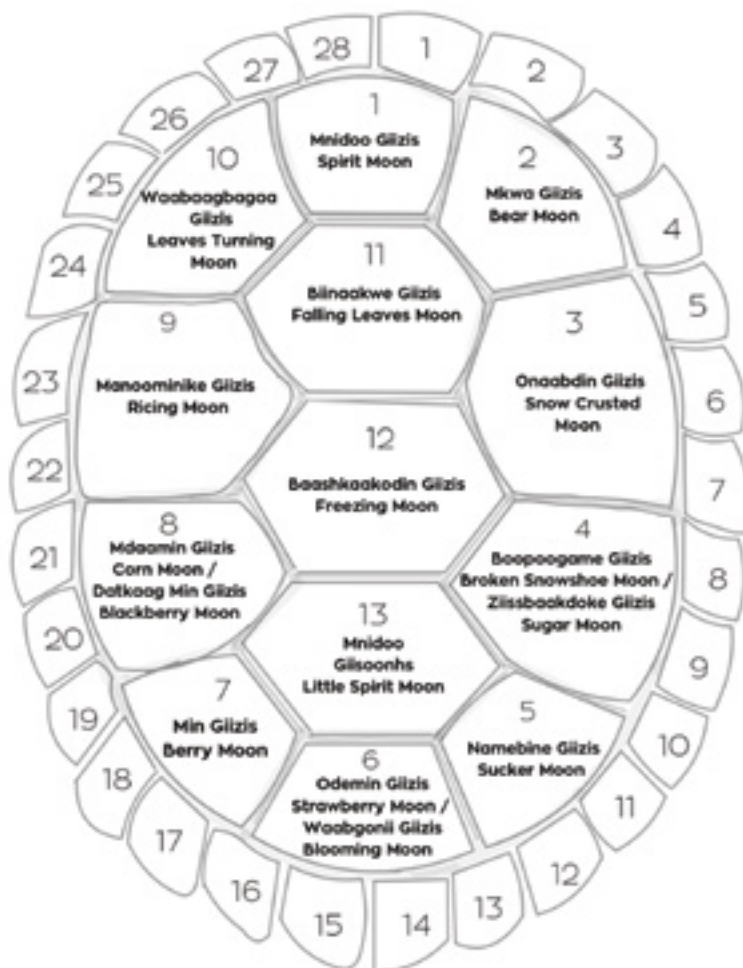
Miigwetchwendam, Ishkakiimakwe
We are grateful, Mother Earth.



Photo Credit: Tsista Kennedy

Anishinaabek Turtle Calendar

This calendar is based on the Full Moon cycle which consists of 13 Full Moons with 28 days between Full Moons. Turtle (Mishiikenh) shells consist of 13 scutes in the middle and 28 ridges on the outside. Inside each of the 13 scutes you'll find the Anishinaabe names of each moon named after a seasonal influence.



Note that these moon names may vary by location and/or community.

Who Did You Find?

The most common turtle species found on roads in the Parry Sound & Muskoka Districts include:



Midland Painted Turtle

Miskwaadesi

- Olive to brownish-grey carapace with orange-red margins.
- Neck, legs & tail striped with red & yellow.
- Males have very long nails on front feet.
- Lays 3-14 oval, white, smooth-shelled eggs.
- Status: **Special Concern**.



Snapping Turtle

Mikinaak

- Large head, two barbels on neck.
- Tail is same length or longer than carapace.
- Could be described as dinosaur-like or most prehistoric looking.
- Only aggressive when threatened on land.
- Will swim away from danger and people when in the water.
- Lays 20-40 round, ping-pong ball-like eggs.
- Status: **Special Concern**.



Northern Map Turtle

- Fine yellow lines on olive green to brownish shell, resembling a map.
- Slight raised area down centre of shell.
- Yellow spot behind each eye.
- Lays 10-16 oblong, parchment-shelled eggs.
- Status: **Special Concern**.

Who Did You Find?

The most common turtle species found on roads in the Parry Sound & Muskoka Districts include:



Blanding's Turtle

- Bright yellow on chin and throat.
- Domed shell that resembles an army helmet.
- Lays 6-11 oval, dull white, hard-shelled eggs.
- Status: **Threatened**.



Spotted Turtle

- Dark turtles with yellow polka dots covering their carapace, head and limbs.
- Undersides of limbs are often yellow, orange or reddish.
- Lays approximately 5 eggs per year.
- Status: **Endangered**.



Eastern Musk Turtle

- Domed shell that is brown in colour, with black flecks.
- Also known as a stinkpot.
- pointy nose.
- 2 yellow stripes along each side of its head.
- 2-5 brittle eggs are laid per year.
- Status: **Special Concern**.

“ Did you know that turtle in Anishinaabemowin is **Mishiikenh**. Pronounced: Mish-EE-Kay

Finding an Injured Turtle

1. Carefully place the injured turtle in a dry container with holes for ventilation. Have a secure lid because turtles can climb.
2. DO NOT transport turtles in water or provide food.
3. Wash or sanitize your hands after handling the animal.
4. Complete one Injured Turtle Report Card from this booklet.

Please tape this securely to the container. Be sure to not cover any ventilation holes. Accurate location information ensures the turtle can be released back to the same location.

5. Call the Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre (OTCC) at 705-741-5000, they are a turtle hospital!

If the OTCC is not open, please leave a message and follow instructions on the answering machine.

**Learn more
about the
OTCC at:
ontarioturtle.ca**



Proper Turtle Handling

Do:

- ✓ Use both hands, positioned firmly at the side of the turtle.
- ✓ For snapping turtles, position hands at rear of shell.
For larger snapping turtles, position one hand at the rear of the shell and the other underneath the turtle.
- ✓ Expect the turtle to hiss and/or scratch your hands.
- ✓ Expect the turtle to possibly urinate.
- ✓ Always be aware of the turtle's head.

If you are uncomfortable lifting a snapping turtle, use a car mat or shovel to help move the turtle without using your hands.



Do Not:

- ✗ Tap on the shell or knock it.
- ✗ Pick up a turtle that you are not comfortable holding.
- ✗ Pick up a turtle by its tail.



How to Help an Uninjured Turtle Cross The Road

1. Always be aware of road traffic. Only attempt to help the turtle if it is safe to do so and you feel comfortable handling it.

2. Do NOT remove a turtle from the area you found it in. Turtles rely on the ponds and wetlands they are familiar with.

3. Move the turtle in the direction it was going/is facing.

Grip the edge of the shell at the hind legs and raise the back end. Quickly slide your other hand between its back legs to its stomach to support the turtle from its lower shell, then lift.

4. Always wash your hands after handling a turtle!



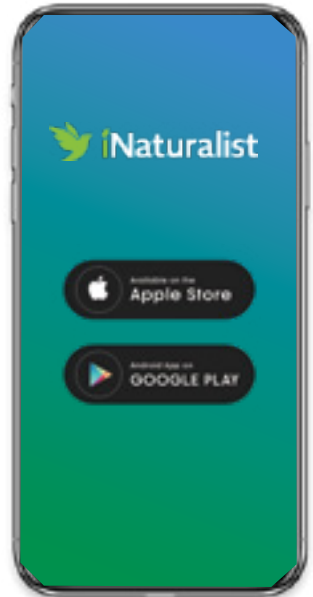
Join our Project!

Join the Georgian Bay Biosphere project on iNaturalist to report your turtle and other species sightings!

This free citizen science app is downloadable in the appstore or online at [iNaturalist.ca](https://www.inaturalist.ca). Find our project by searching “Georgian Bay Biosphere” and click join!

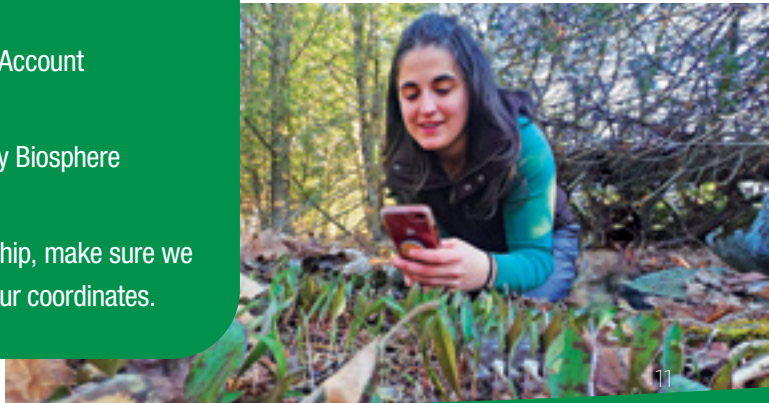



Through this project, we will gather more information about the species on the eastern coast of Georgian Bay to better understand where research and mitigation efforts should be directed. These observations will help guide research questions, mitigation projects, and other conservation initiatives. We thank you for your observations and helping us to learn more!



Steps to Join:

1. Create an iNaturalist Account ([inaturalist.ca](https://www.inaturalist.ca))
2. Join the Georgian Bay Biosphere iNaturalist Project
3. Under your membership, make sure we are “trusted” with your coordinates.



A large turtle, likely a snapping turtle, is seen swimming in dark water. Its head and front legs are visible, and it appears to be near a wooden dock structure made of light-colored planks. The turtle's shell is a mottled brown and green color.

Turtles by the Dock

Turtles play a vital role in our lakes and waterways by keeping waters clean and reducing bacteria levels, thus reducing lowering the likelihood of some bacteria-related illnesses that humans may catch.

How to reduce unwanted turtle interactions:

Don't throw food into the water! This includes human food, fishing bait, fish guts, etc. These yummy treats will attract hungry turtles who will begin seeing your dock as a food source.

Do not feed turtles. While it may seem fun at the time, turtles (like all animals) need to be wary of humans and not see them as a source of food. This is when negative interactions begin to occur. While it may seem fun at the time, turtles (like all animals) need to be wary of humans and not see them as a source of food.

Swim and splash! Swimming and splashing in the water helps the turtle to understand what it is seeing is not food and to know that you are there.

Don't dangle toes! Dangling toes in the water can look like bugs or worms on the water surface to a turtle. If you want to hang your feet off the dock, fully engulf them and splash around a bit!

Stay calm! If you see a turtle in the water, enjoy the moment and watch it! Do not push, kick, or hurt the turtle. This can cause injury for the turtle, who is just trying to swim by.

Busting some Turtle Myths:

True or False

Turtles are mean: FALSE! Turtles are incredibly gentle and curious creatures, even snapping turtles! They snap or hiss because they are scared and see YOU as a predator.

A turtle bite can break your finger: FALSE! Turtles in Canada do not have enough jaw power to break bone or ligament.

It's okay to remove turtles from around the dock: FALSE! Not only is it illegal to move turtles from their habitat, it can also be a death sentence! Turtles rely strongly on places they know to survive.

You can safely swim beside a snapping turtle: TRUE! You've likely swam by turtles before without even knowing it! While they may be curious and watch you, turtles are not interested in nibbling humans unless out of self defense. We are too large and not stinky enough to be a food source!



Hooked Turtles

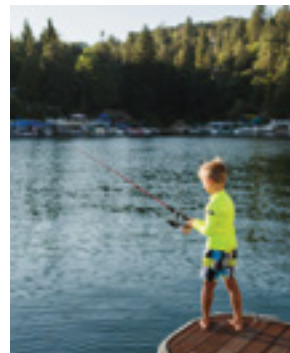
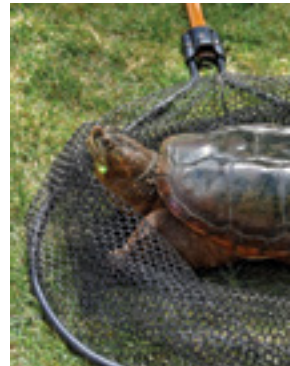
While turtles are caretakers of our lakes, scavenging mostly on dead organic matter, they can also take live prey. This means there is potential that they can get caught on baited fishing hooks or lures. Much of this risk can be avoided by altering how we fish.

How to avoid hooking a turtle:

- Avoid fishing in areas where you see turtles or have seen turtles in the past.
- Use lures that are less appetizing to turtles. Consider using baits that are not live, worms are particularly attractive to turtles.
- Use less “stinky” bait. The stinkier your bait, the more attracted turtles might be to it.
- Use hooks without barbs to reduce severity of injury if a turtle becomes hooked.
- Remove fishing hooks that are snagged on vegetation, rather than just cutting the line and abandoning the hook.

What to do when you have hooked a turtle:

- DO NOT cut your fishing line.
- Reel the turtle in slowly & gently to prevent the hook digging in deeper.
- Remove the turtle from the water using a fishing net or properly lifting the turtle (see page 9).
- DO NOT lift the turtle out of the water by the fishing line or tail.
- If you catch a small turtle and are able to safely and with ease remove the hook the turtle should be returned to the water in the area you caught the turtle.
- If you are unable to safely remove the hook OR do not feel comfortable handling the turtle place the turtle in a secure container and call the OTCC (705-741-5000) for further direction.



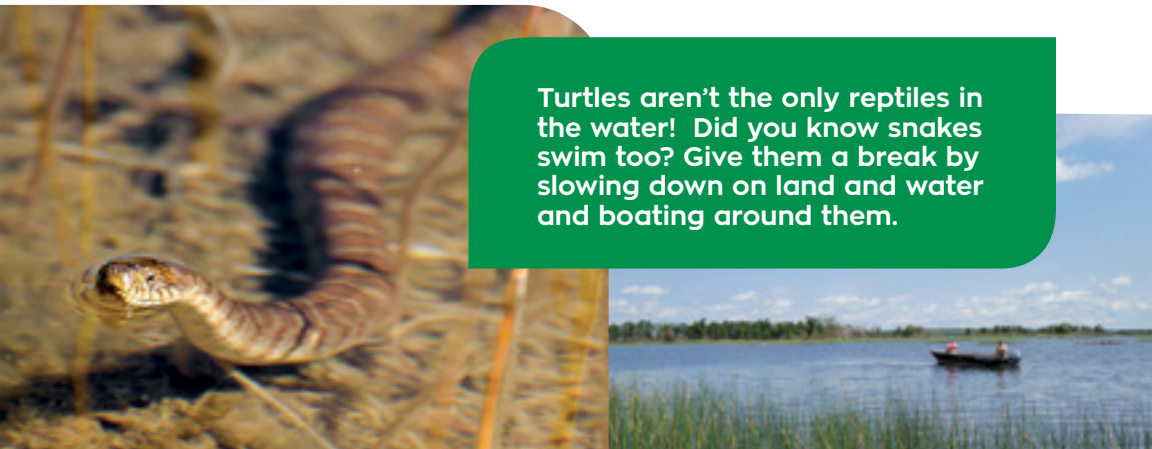
Boating Around Turtle Habitat

Slow down! Turtles can be injured by boat propellers.

Tips for boating in turtle habitat:

- Slow down completely out of main channels and in areas where you could come across turtles (i.e., shallow waters, wetlands, swamps).
- In areas where it is shallow and/or there are many turtles, consider switching off your propeller altogether.
- Do not boat toward turtles to get a closer look! This will cause them to spook and go into the water, increasing chances of propeller injury.
- Watch for turtles near the surface. Often, only their head comes above the surface looking like a dull branch or log sticking up a few inches out of the water.

If you hit a turtle while boating or see a turtle with an injury call the OTCC (705-741-5000) for further direction.



Turtles aren't the only reptiles in the water! Did you know snakes swim too? Give them a break by slowing down on land and water and boating around them.

Identify snakes in water based on how they float! Watersnakes will hold their head above water while the rest of their body is below water. The Massasauga rattlesnake (stout and shorter) and the Foxsnake (skinnier and longer) will have their entire bodies floating on the surface. Be watchful on the water! These animals can sometimes look like sticks or logs floating in the water.

Nesting Turtles

When you find a nesting turtle on a roadway:

1. If safe to do so, pull over.
2. Keep your distance to avoid spooking the turtle (at least two car lengths away).
3. Call the Saving Turtles at Risk Today (START) Project hotline (705-955-4284) to report your observation if the turtle is NOT a Painted turtle or Snapping turtle. Depending on the species and location of the nest, a team may be deployed to excavate nests laid in precarious areas (such as roadsides where nest protectors are unsafe to place).
4. Wait until turtle has stopped nesting and is walking away. Once turtle covers the nest, make sure it has traveled off the road safely.



For instructions on how to
build a nest protector, visit
cwf-fcf.org/en/



ons on how to
rotector, visit:
/explore/turtles

When you find a nesting
turtle on private property:

1. Keep your distance to avoid spooking the turtle (at least two car lengths away).
2. Mark where the turtle has laid its nest to ensure you avoid walking/driving on that area. You can install your own nesting cage (such as on your lawn or side of driveway).
3. Call the Saving Turtles at Risk Today (START) Project hotline (705-955-4284) to report your observation and depending on the species and location of the nest, a team may be deployed to excavate nests laid in precarious areas (such as roadsides where nest protectors are unsafe to place).



Other Ways To Keep Turtles Safe:

Turtles are not good pets! They require as much attention as a dog or cat, and will often outlive their owners. Many of Ontario's native turtle species also grow to be very large. Being a responsible pet owner can greatly impact our native turtles.

- NEVER take a wild turtle home as a pet, this is illegal and damaging to native populations.
- NEVER purchase a turtle that is native to Ontario. It was likely taken from the wild illegally. If you see native turtles being sold online, report the seller to the Conservation Officer TIPS LINE 1-877-TIPS-MNR.
- NEVER release a pet turtle into the wild, do your best to rehome them. Captive turtles can introduce diseases to wild populations and may become an invasive problem.
- Keep your pets on a leash! Dogs can often see turtles as toys. Keeping them on a leash will ensure the safety of both your dog and the turtle.

Ontario turtle populations are still under threat from poachers.

- If you see someone acting suspiciously or in an unusual location (for example a person in a wetland holding a bag) call the Conservation Officer TIPS LINE 1-877-TIPS-MNR.
- People love turtle photos, but do not share exact locations of your turtle sightings on social media. Only give coordinates to a researcher or people you trust.



**If you run out of Injured Turtle Report Cards,
please contact the Biosphere for more.**

Photo Credits: Tianna Burke, Gord Darlington, Sean Boyle, Alanna Smolarz, S.T.A.R.T. Program, Kelsey Marchand, Robin Lloyd

Use these Injured Turtle Report Cards when you find an injured turtle that will be delivered to the Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre.

Call 705-741-5000 when you find an injured turtle.



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



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The Georgian Bay Biosphere is a non-profit registered Canadian charity. We are a community-based organization that works with partners in our region to protect the environment, create vibrant communities, and support a healthy economy by building capacity through education and culture.



GEORGIAN BAY
FOREVER



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Together • Renewal • Land • Life



S.T.A.R.T.
TURTLE PROJECT
SAVING TURTLES AT RISK TODAY



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Environment and
Climate Change Canada

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Changement climatique Canada



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