

FINAL REPORT FOR R.E.A.C.T.

REHABILITATION, EDUCATION AND CONSERVATION FOR TURTLES

September 2016



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Ontario Wildlife Foundation Saves Vulnerable Turtles!

Over the past year, many wild turtles have been helped thanks to the Ontario Wildlife Foundation (OWF). As stated in our grant proposal, TWC's project objectives included:

- 1) Provision of veterinary and rehabilitative care to injured turtles.
- 2) The harvesting and incubation of turtle eggs as necessary with the ultimate goal of releasing hatchlings to the wild.
- 3) Educating the public on issues affecting Ontario's turtles.

This report will highlight the accomplishments made possible because of your generous support of REACT.

Veterinary and Rehabilitative Care to Injured Turtles

Since September 2015, TWC has admitted...



14
Painted Turtles



9
Snapping Turtles
(species of special concern)



1
Northern Map
Turtle
(species of special concern)

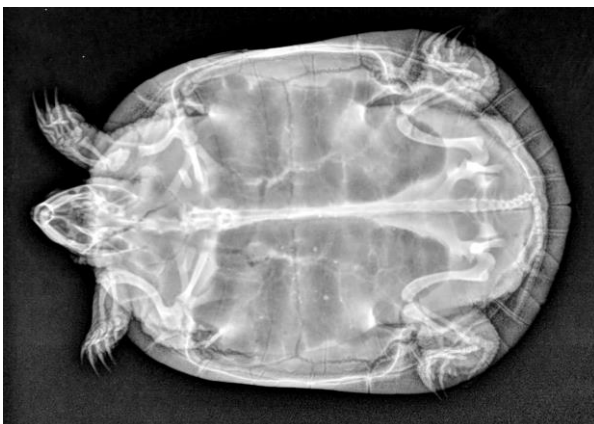
Your support helped 25 injured wild turtles during the grant period. Although fewer turtles than usual were admitted over the past year, many suffered from severe injuries and required a lengthy period of care. Additional x-rays, extra check-ups by the veterinary team, as well as more days of regular care (full cleaning of enclosures and provision of behavioural enrichment, preparation of diets and monitoring of health) is time intensive and adds to the cost of treatment. The following is an update on one patient who spent almost 2 months in care at TWC. Her story outlines the comprehensive care our patients receive and demonstrates how your donation dollars have been put to work to benefit injured turtles.

A Turtle Story – The Road to Recovery

On July 25th, Jennifer was driving along a busy road outside of Zephyr (near Lake Simcoe) when she came across a turtle in desperate need of help. She contained it and called TWC's Wildlife Emergency Hotline right away...

"Hello, I found a painted turtle...she got clipped by a truck. She has cracks on both upper and bottom shells, near the head. She was crawling a bit funny when I managed to get her...I would definitely like to bring her in and have her looked at and be cared for by the proper people."

Upon arrival, TWC's medical team assessed and x-rayed the turtle and determined she suffered from a fractured carapace and plastron, as well as a broken leg. This turtle would require extensive medical treatment and care to heal. Returning females to the wild is especially important since it takes many years for them to reach sexual maturity. The loss of even one breeding-age turtle can impact ecosystems and turtle populations.



Over the past two months, this turtle's care has included:

- 3 sets of x-rays
- 5 veterinary assessments/treatments
- Daily monitoring with progress check-ups by a senior wildlife rehabilitator every 3rd day
- 1 consultation with another veterinarian specializing in turtle care
- 3 weeks administration of Ceftazadine (antibiotic)
- 3 weeks administrations of Tramadol (pain-killer) given by TWC staff
- 3 injections of sodium chloride (for dehydration given by TWC staff
- Cleaning of wounds every day for the first 5 days of care completed by TWC staff
- Cleaning of shell every 3rd day for first 2 weeks of care by TWC staff
- Daily cleaning of enclosure by volunteers
- Daily feeding of mealworms, earthworms and turtle pellets
- Lighting with a UV lamp to strengthen and protect her shell

A conservative approximate cost of care for this one turtle exceeds \$1500. In a veterinary clinic, the cost would be much higher. TWC simply could not help as many long-term care turtle patients as we do without the support of our dedicated volunteers, who minimize costs by generously donating their time, and financial supporters like Ontario Wildlife Foundation.

Thanks to you, we can focus on the value of saving one turtle's life, rather than the cost.

A Happy Ending – Release Back to the Wild

On September 21st, this painted turtle's story came full circle. Almost two months after being admitted to TWC, broken and suffering from injuries that may have cost the turtle its life, Jennifer picked up the turtle to return it to its natural habitat, healthy and able to survive in the wild once again.



The time that a turtle spends in care depends on various factors including the complexity of the injuries, the season, and how quickly the injury is healing. TWC must ensure that all patients are able to survive in the wild. On average, turtle patients during the grant period spent 58 days in care. Like Jennifer's turtle, some have required much longer care. A few examples include:

- A painted turtle brought to TWC from Schomberg in May with a badly cracked shell that remains in our care
- A painted turtle from Caledon that was found on some patio stones, cold and covered in mud in November. It would not have survived the winter had it not been brought to TWC. The support of OWF allowed us to care for this turtle for 8 months and finally release it back to the wild this past June!
- Two snapping turtles from Minesing (near Barrie) that were turned up in a vegetable garden in November, still surrounded by their shells in the nest where they had been laid as eggs! TWC provided the care these young turtles needed throughout the winter and they were released to grow up in the wild this past May!

The cost of veterinary and rehabilitative care, food, UV and heat lamps, daily care and cleaning for turtles in care for months upon months is expensive - without generous donations from supporters like OWF, fewer turtles (including species-at-risk in Ontario) would receive life-saving care.

Harvesting and Incubating Turtle Eggs

The past year has been an anomaly for TWC's turtle egg hatching program. To harvest eggs, female patients admitted to TWC carrying eggs must be injured beyond repair – we cannot harvest eggs from a living turtle that is a rehabilitation candidate. As such, no egg harvesting opportunities arose this year. Our team did attempt to incubate and hatch 7 eggs brought in by a member of the public. Unfortunately, the eggs were not in good condition upon arrival and despite our best efforts, the eggs were not viable.

It is difficult to predict what species will be admitted and in what numbers. In previous years, it has not been uncommon to harvest and incubate dozens of eggs within one season. The past year has been a departure from our experience since we began our turtle hatching program in 2011. Due to the high number of severely injured adult turtles (and lack of eggs), funding from OWF was redirected toward the care of complex medical cases; we are grateful for your support in this area.

Educating the Public on Issues Affecting Ontario's Turtles

TWC has provided educational opportunities for the public about issues affecting turtles in a variety of ways including:



Presentations to children and community groups

TWC Education staff delivered 7 turtle-focused presentations during the grant period reaching over 200 children, youth and adults. Hot Dog, TWC's educational snapping turtle, accompanied our staff to teach audiences about threats to Ontario's turtles as well as the importance of leaving wild animals in the wild.

Sharing patient stories on social media

TWC reaches thousands of people on Facebook and Twitter by sharing patient stories, like this one about a snapping turtle which received surgery for a badly cracked shell, highlighting the risks to turtles as they cross busy roads.

Eighteen turtle-related stories were posted on Facebook and seventeen more were posted to Twitter. Of these, five posts specifically recognized OWF as supporters of TWC's turtle rehabilitation program.



Continually improving and helping others do the same

The field of wildlife rehabilitation is constantly evolving. As such, it is critical for our team to keep up with best practices, explore and develop new techniques, and educate fellow wildlife rehabilitators on methods that have proven successful. Over the past year, our rehabilitation team has:

- Developed physiotherapy procedures for turtles; a painted turtle currently in care undergoes this treatment on a regular basis to improve sluggishness in one of its legs with noted improvements
- Increased our knowledge regarding reptile anaesthesia through an online course– a much more complicated process than in mammals
- Presented at the National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association (NWRA) conference in Oklahoma; this past spring, TWC's Wildlife Rehabilitation Manager Lisa Fosco, accompanied by Senior Wildlife Rehabilitator Ashely Knoebel, educated hundreds of wildlife rehabilitators from North America and beyond on TWC's turtle hatching program, helping others to learn from our successes and challenges, and creating the capacity to help turtles beyond the Greater Toronto Area

Because you REACTed...

When OWF learned about an opportunity to improve the situation for Ontario's turtles, you reacted. You created the capacity to give a second chance at life in the wild to turtles facing life-threatening conditions. You supported efforts to teach children, youth and adults about the hazards turtles face and promote ways to make our world more friendly and accommodating for these incredible reptile species.

Over the past year...

Turtles recovered from devastating wounds...because you reacted.

Members of the public increased their knowledge about the plight of turtles...because you reacted.



...because you REACTed

TWC would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to OWF for your generous support of rehabilitation, education and conservation for turtles.

With gratitude,

Nathalie Karvonen

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