

Saving Eastern Musk Turtle:

What you can do to help

The Eastern Musk Turtle (*Sternotherus odoratus*) is a small shy turtle that rarely leaves the water. Its carapace (top shell) is smooth, narrow and high-domed. The carapace is olive to black in colour and its head and legs are dark brown to black. Its plastron (bottom shell) is yellow-brown in colour and very small so its legs have little protection. The plastron has a hinge at the front so it can close upward to protect the turtle's head. It spends a lot of time underwater so often its shell is covered in mud or algae. Adults have a light stripe above and below their eyes and fleshy 'whiskers' called barbels on their chin and throat.

Do you live near Eastern Musk Turtles?

In the Carolinian zone the Eastern Musk Turtle is found at several sites close to the edges of Lake Huron, Lake Erie, and Lake Ontario.

They live in soft-bottomed lakes, streams, marshes, ponds and rivers. They prefer shallow, slow-moving water and lots of aquatic vegetation. They walk along the bottom of the waterbody feeding and bask under floating vegetation.

During the summer, the females will make their nests close to the water at sites exposed to direct sunlight. The eggs are laid on open ground or in shallow excavations in decaying vegetation, rotting wood or gravel.

In the winter they hibernate underwater, buried in the mud.

What you can do to help

- ✓ Control erosion along roads, trails and during construction to minimize risk of sediment release into rivers, streams, lakes and marshes.
- ✓ Create or expand small sunlit clearings on the north side (south facing bank) of the waterbody to be used as possible nesting sites.



Photo credit: Scott Gillingwater

Field check

- ✓ Maximum length 13 cm
- ✓ Barbels (fleshy 'whiskers') on chin and throat.
- ✓ Two light coloured stripes along each side of head
- ✓ Emits a musky odour when handled

Did you know?

This species is often called the "stinkpot turtle" because turtles emit a musky skunk-like odour when disturbed.

- ✓ Work involving heavy equipment, or other potential risks to turtles, should not occur within 50m of known habitat during peak nesting season (June 1- 30) as turtles are moving about on land at this time and can be crushed by vehicles or disturbed while nesting.
- ✓ When possible, restrict boat and fishing access to water bodies where Eastern Musk Turtles are known to live to prevent disturbance of and/or injuries to this species
- ✓ Retain natural shorelines (e.g. vegetation, fallen trees in water, etc.). Provide additional habitat by placing partly submerged logs near the shore to be used by basking turtles.
- ✓ Limit the use of outside lights.

General Best Stewardship Practices

- ✓ **Keep domestic pets on a leash** when outside to prevent them from harming or harassing native wildlife.
- ✓ **Learn to identify invasive species.** Your local Conservation Authority or Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources Office can provide you with information on invasive species that occur in your area and what you can do to help prevent their spread.
- ✓ **Learn about stewardship activities** in your area and actively participate in protecting Species at Risk. To find more information about stewardship activities in your area, contact your local Stewardship Council or Conservation Authority.
- ✓ **Take advantage of the Environmental Farm Plan program.** To learn more contact the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources or the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.
- ✓ **Report any illegal activity** related to plants and wildlife to 1-877-TIPS-MNR (847-7667)

Did you know?

If you have Species at Risk on your property, you may be eligible for stewardship programs or financial incentives that support the protection and recovery of Species at Risk and their habitats. Contact the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources for more information.

Status

Threatened nationally and provincially. It is illegal to kill, harm or collect the species, or to destroy its habitat in Ontario.

Carolinian Canada Coalition is working with local Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources Offices, Conservation Authorities and other Non-Governmental Organizations to recover Species at Risk.

You can help the recovery efforts by protecting this species and its habitat.

Good sources of information

Carolinian Canada Coalition:

www.carolinian.org

Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources:

Includes information about Ontario Species at Risk
www.mnr.gov.on.ca/en/

Natural Heritage Information Centre

<http://nhic.mnr.gov.on.ca/>

Find your local Conservation Authority Office:

www.conservationontario.ca

Government of Canada Species at Risk Public Registry:

www.sararegistry.gc.ca

Find your local Stewardship Council:

www.ontariostewardship.org

Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association

Includes information about the Environmental Farm Plan
ontariosoilcrop.org

Toronto Zoo Adopt-a-Pond

Learn more about Ontario's reptiles, their habitat and related conservation initiatives.
www.torontozoo.com/Adoptapond

Ontario's Reptile and Amphibian Atlas

See how you can participate and learn more about Ontario's reptiles and amphibians.
www.ontarionature.org/protect/species/herpetofauna_l_atlas.php

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