

# Conservation Update

September 2020

## A Turtle-y Awesome Summer!

For the last several years, the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority (SCRCA) Biology team has kicked-off the field season with their turtle head start program. Ontario is home to eight different species of turtles, all of which are considered Species at Risk (SAR). The St. Clair Region is home to six of these species including the endangered Eastern Spiny Softshell (*Apalone spinifer*) that is facing imminent extinction or extirpation.

In spring and early summer, female turtles migrate from the safety of wetlands, ponds and rivers to seek out a suitable location to lay their eggs, exposing themselves to numerous threats including predation and road mortality. Even when a female turtle successfully lays her eggs, many nests are at risk of predation by raccoons, skunks and weasels and human activities including ATV traffic and even hikers. These factors have severely limited the success of local nests and have impacted Ontario's turtle populations.

In an effort to support local populations, SCRCA biologists carefully collect eggs from turtle nests that are under imminent threat and incubate the eggs until the hatchlings emerge and are ready for release in their natural habitat. Each hatchling is released in the same location the eggs were initially found. The 2020 program saw the successful rescue, incubation, hatching and release of 786 turtles including 480 Eastern Spiny Softshell and 306 Snapping turtles (*Chelydra serpentina*). It is hoped that this program will improve the survival rate of turtle hatchlings by helping them get past their first hurdle in life.



The Eastern Spiny Softshell turtle is easily recognized by its round, flat and leathery shell and snorkel-like snout. They have been found in southwestern Ontario, primarily in the Sydenham and Thames rivers.



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## BINGO Supports St. Clair Region Conservation Foundation

Since 1996, St. Clair Region Conservation Foundation volunteers raise funds through bingo games offered by the Sarnia Charitable Gaming Association. The proceeds are a significant component of our support for outdoor education, development of recreation facilities at conservation areas, species at risk research, tree planting and youth programs within Lambton County.

Many projects and activities have benefitted from these funds including:

- Trail improvements, tree planting and habitat restoration at our Conservation Areas;
- Free horse-drawn wagon rides at our annual Maple Syrup Festival;
- Outdoor education equipment like pond study nets, rain jackets, and GPS units for students to use; and
- Field equipment essential for our biologists to monitor the environmental health of the region (e.g., waders, nets, field guides, etc.).

Thank you to our volunteers and the City of Sarnia for your long-standing support of conservation in the St. Clair Region and Lambton County.



Wetland creation at Warwick Conservation



Bingo funds allow our conservation educators to supply local students with the tools they need to investigate the natural world and learn more about local conservation efforts.



Proceeds help our biologists purchase important equipment such as nets and waders so they can efficiently and safely monitor species at risk throughout the watershed.



## 2020 CITO (Cache In, Trash Out) Event – September 20, 2020

The weather couldn't have been better for the annual geocaching event held at the Lorne C. Henderson Conservation Area on September 20th. Although slightly altered due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 CITO (Cache In, Trash Out) Geocaching event attracted 23 participants from as far as Waterloo, Ancaster, Brantford and Chatham.

For many, their visit to the conservation area was for the first time. In addition to searching for new and creative cache containers, they helped with a garbage clean up along the trails. The SCRCA supplied gloves and small bags.

Everyone was impressed with the cleanliness of the park and said they would be back with their families!

We hope to return to the traditional Geocaching Event in 2021!



Geocaching is a real-world, outdoor treasure hunt that uses Global Positioning Systems (GPS) to assist participants in locating hidden caches (containers). There are over three million geocaches hidden around the world, including the St. Clair Region. To learn more, visit [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com).

## Socially distanced Ipperwash Beach Shoreline Cleanup a Success!

On Saturday, September 12th, 35 volunteers headed to Ipperwash Beach to take part in a shoreline cleanup in support of the Healthy Lake Huron program initiative.

The morning event resulted in the collection of enough garbage to fill up the back of a pick-up truck. Similar to previous years, cigarette butts were scattered along the shoreline and were again, the item collected in the largest quantity. Other items included diapers, blankets, wire, broken metal and glass.



Thanks to the local volunteers, the Centre Ipperwash Community Association, the Municipality of Lambton Shores and the Ipperwash Beach Club who generously donated ice cream to everyone who participated in the end-of-summer cleanup!

## School is Back in Session!

With the 2020-2021 school year officially underway, the SCRCA conservation education team has been hard at work developing new programming options for both Elementary and Secondary school students and families in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The suite of new programs allows for the continued engagement of our watershed students in environmental topics and support local teachers who are teaching both in-person or online. New conservation education program options include schoolyard "Nature in your Neighbourhood", "Live-Stream with a Naturalist", "Virtual Field Trips" and "Family Field Trips" to the Lorne C. Henderson Conservation Area for groups of up to 10 individuals.

More information on these programs and how to book are available at [www.scrca.on.ca/govirtual](http://www.scrca.on.ca/govirtual).



### Next Conservation Authority Board Meeting

Thursday, November 12, 2020 10:00 am  
(Virtual Meeting)

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