

Halton Hills Turtle Guardians working hard to ensure protection of turtles

Early summer is a busy time of year for the Halton Hills Turtle Guardians as they work to ensure the safety of local turtles.

According to Peter Duncanson, of the Halton Hills Turtle Guardians, they are in the midst of placing nest boxes as this is the time of year when turtles are laying their eggs.

Nest boxes are designed to sit over the eggs, that are in a vulnerable area, to protect them from predators. The nest boxes constructed using 2x4's, with an opening on one end, with wire screening on top, and are put in place with stakes hammered into the ground.

In some cases, where nest boxes cannot be used, such as the side of a road, Duncanson says they then have to get permission from the Ministry of Natural Resources in order to excavate the nest and move the eggs to a safer place.

"The hatchlings, we have problems with, and depending on the circumstances of the nest, under permit, we can excavate the nest. Turtles that lay on the side of the road are a big problem because we are not allowed to put nest boxes there, MTO won't allow it."

In addition to turtles laying eggs on the side of the road, comes the risk of them being hit by cars.

If you do see a turtle trying to cross the road, be sure to carry it in the direction that it is travelling, and if you see an injured turtle, the main thing to do is not to panic, reminds Duncanson.

"We get the calls where there's a turtle on the road or a turtle's been hit. Of course, the main thing with this is we don't have to panic because we have help. We can get the turtle to the OTCC, which is in Peterborough, and we have a turtle taxi to get them there. So all it is, is a matter of putting the turtle in a bin and waiting for the taxi to arrive... It's upsetting, but don't panic."

To further prevent turtles getting hit on the road, Duncanson says the Town of Halton Hills has been working with the group to install turtle crossing signs in Acton and across Halton Hills, to warn drivers to be on the lookout in areas where turtles are known to cross the road.

Duncanson notes another challenge that the Turtle Guardians face is protecting turtles from poachers, who will either take them for the pet trade or for food purposes. Poaching is an illegal act as most species are listed as "at risk" or "threatened" in Ontario.



Peter Duncanson speaking at a Halton Hills Turtle Guardian information session. *Scott Brooks photo*

As part of ensuring the turtles are protected, it takes people power and the Halton Hills Turtle Guardians are always looking for more volunteers to help with protection efforts in Acton, Georgetown, and other areas across Halton Hills.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer, you can reach out to the Halton Hills Turtle Guardians on Facebook. This is also where you can report turtle sightings, injuries, and other concerns.



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