

BE THE CHANGE



MIKE LIZOLA ROCHA PHOTOS

Conservation Award conferred upon local group working to protect endangered turtles

Deserved recognition for The Turtles of Old Ottawa East and South

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Members of The Turtles of Old Ottawa East and South (Turtles) announced in April that the group has been presented with the prestigious 2023 Conservation Award by the Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club in recognition of their outstanding contribution to the cause of natural history conservation in the Ottawa Valley, and in particular, for their innovative work in helping to preserve and protect turtles in Ottawa. The Conservation Award announcement was posted on April 20th by François Lavallée (one of the original founders of the Turtles' private Facebook group which now numbers around 925 members).

The Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club (OFNC), which was founded in 1863, is the oldest natural history club in Canada. Its members participate in many aspects of the natural world, from birding to botanizing, investigation to publication, conservation to cooperation.

OFNC awards have been conferred on an (almost) annual basis since 1992, with most of them being presented to club members. But the club's Conservation Award is one dedicated to non-members of OFNC, and normally results from a nomination process. In this case, according to Lavallée, the Turtles organization had no advance warning that it was to receive the 2023 Conservation Award.

Previous recipients of the Conservation Award have been recognized for youth engagement, for the protection of specific natural areas and wet lands, for the preservation of species, for modifying habitats in certain areas to assist endangered species, for championing water resources, and for education efforts. To date, there have been a number of conservation awards presented to individuals and groups for efforts in turtle conservation – in Lanark County, at the Britannia Conservation Area, for turtle crossing signs along highways in southeastern Ontario, and now to this community's own local group.

The Turtles group came into being in 2021 when a group of residents in the Brewer Park to Brantwood Park area along the Rideau River came together to build nest protectors to keep turtle eggs safe from predators. The now-thriving Turtles of Old Ottawa East and South Facebook group was formed to link people together, to share information about turtle nesting sites and to provide hatching updates. A website was subsequently created

[linktr.ee/turtlesOOES], and an email address [turtles.ooes@gmail.com] is now available for non-Facebook users to communicate the location of nests or hatchlings.

The group's efforts have been growing steadily. In their first year, 2021, nesting season had already begun so only about 12 nests were protected by cages. In 2022, approximately 20 nests were located and protected, while last year over 40 protectors were installed. Although the overwhelming majority of nests protected have been for snapping turtles, two to four painted turtles' nests have also been protected over the last several years.

A large part of this growth in efforts can be attributed to the increasing awareness of residents in Old Ottawa East and South; the 30 - 40 Facebook members at inception grew to between 100 and 200 people by the end of the first season. Now at close to 1000 members, the community network has more eyes on the ground to spot egg-laying turtles so that nest protectors can be quickly installed. The sites can also be routinely checked throughout the incubation period. When hatchlings are spotted, the volunteer network puts up signs and writes chalk messages to alert pedestrians and cyclists to watch out as the small turtles start their journey to the river.



SUPPLIED PHOTO

Members of Turtles of Old Ottawa East and South from (l) to (r) Mike Lizola Rocha, Greg MacDougall and François Lavallée receive their award certificate from Jakob Mueller, President of the Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club.

*Phyllis Odenbach Sutton is herself a proud member of the Turtles private Facebook group and a regular contributor to *The Mainstreeter**



*What more can readers of *The Mainstreeter* do to help protect the endangered turtles living in our community? As the biggest predation concerns are when eggs are laid or when they hatch, watching and sharing information on nest locations with the Turtles group is key (either via the Facebook group or the email address listed above). Note that June is typically prime season for egg laying while September is the prime hatching month.*

There is also often a need for additional protectors. This year one of the local Scout groups made five new nest protectors while a concerned high school student made another five. If you have basic wood working skills, you can offer up your talents to the Turtles group as well.