

THE NEST BOX, NUMBER 8, SPRING 2003

THE OTTAWA DUCK CLUB

726 Weston Drive, Ottawa, ON, K1G 1W2

www.ncf.ca/odc/



UPCOMING EVENTS

***** Don't forget Family and Friends evening MAY 27 at the sanctuary — this is the best time to visit as nesting activity is at its peak. PLEASE NOTE: We will not be serving food this year, but soft drinks will be available. *****

Then it's Tuesdays at the sanctuary, Range Control permitting, until the fall. If you plan on going out, contact **Bill Bower (824-9104)**, **Dale Crook (232-2902)** or **Austin Taverner (824-4654)** to confirm access. The access gate off March Valley Road will be unlocked, but make sure to look for the big red flag that signals the range is in use and it's not healthy to go in.

CLUB NEWS

Mea culpa. I owe **Barc Dowden** an apology for missing him when I was handing out thank-yous in the last issue. So thanks Barc for your \$100 donation to the club.

If you didn't make it to the annual meeting, you missed the chance to overthrow the executive and directors and take charge yourselves. Now you're stuck with us all for another year. Let that be a lesson to you.

We have some new members to welcome: **Joe Bevk** and **Lori Taverner**. Lori is, as some of you may know, Austin's daughter and Joe is her husband. Joe made a strong impression by donating \$200 to the club right off the bat. Thank you Joe. **James Peardon** was hooked at the Carlingwood Wildlife Festival Event. James is a cabinet maker who lives in Manotick and loves photography and the outdoors and was really impressed by his first visit to the sanctuary. He came all the way from British Columbia to join the club. **Lene Kollgard** also joined at Carlingwood.

It's great to see some new blood in the club, and I'm sure the mosquitoes will be just as happy as we are.

Don Davies has built a new duck float that he says will discourage the geese (must be pretty impressive, geese don't seem to discourage easily). Now he wants to get working on that bridge—volunteers welcome to help.

Nesting is now well underway. Any patch of land big enough for a **Canada goose** to nest on is being nested on. As of late April, Austin says we had 82 **wood duck** and 29 **hooded merganser** eggs. A **bittern** has been heard, but not seen. **Tree swallows** are swooping and diving everywhere, eating mosquitoes (yeh!). The **great blue herons** have been on their nests for weeks. Also seen: **mallard**, **green-winged teal**, **scaup**, **red-winged blackbird**, **phoebe**, **song sparrow**, **killderr**, **red-tailed hawk**, **white-tailed deer**, a brave **porcupine** in a tree over the berms, **muskrat**, and a pair of large **beaver**. There is a **robin** nesting in our outhouse—Bill questions whether they really can hear and smell so well.

Dale asked me to mention that Austin has decided to track 12 nest boxes that are most active and interesting instead of the same boring old dozen year after year. If you check the club's Web site, under activities, you can "follow the nesting progress of 12 boxes."

Ontario Wetland Habitat Fund

At the annual meeting, we had a second presentation from **Katherine-Ann Laman** of the Ontario Wetland Habitat Fund.

Katherine-Ann is the OWHF's representative for the "Bay to Bay" project which covers the area between Constance Bay and Shirley's Bay. The Ottawa Duck Club will be working with the Fund to achieve conservation goals set for this migratory corridor.

Through this program, landowners can receive conservation advice and financing for habitat enhancement activities within wetlands and adjacent uplands. Approved projects may receive 50 per cent of the total project cost, up to \$5,000. Eligible projects include: building and erecting nesting boxes, creating nesting islands, digging open water cells, installing water control structures, tree planting and more.

The Ottawa Duck Club, with assistance from the National Capital Commission and the OWHF, are coordinating a project together for Watt's Creek. The proposed expansion of the club's efforts include building, erecting and maintaining additional nesting boxes in Watt's Creek between Carling Avenue and Highway 417. The Ottawa Duck Club has successfully supported habitat enhancement in Ottawa and is highly regarded by the National Capital Commission.

The Ontario Wetland Habitat Fund is looking forward to working with the Ottawa Duck Club on projects that will enhance wildlife habitat. For more information, please call Katherine-Ann Laman at 722-2090 x403.

Night Songs at the Sanctuary

By Dale Crook (*Dale submitted this article for the Spring 2002 issue, There wasn't enough room for it then, but it's kept well.*)

An article in the Citizen "The songs of our planet," on April 22, 2002, got me interested in what learning frogs we could expect to hear calling at the sanctuary.

After checking the calls on the Internet, I spent a few evenings listening around our ponds. Sure enough, over the noisy geese and the occasional grebe, there were other interesting sounds.

The first frogs heard in the spring are the **spring peeper**, the **wood frog**, the **western/stripped chorus frog**, and of course the **American toad**.

The spring peeper's call is a single, loud, high pitch peep repeated over and over.



Spring peeper (Photo by Adopt-A-Pond)

The wood frog's call is a series of quacks, almost like a duck.



Wood frog (Photo by Adopt-A-Pond)

The western/stripped chorus frog's call sounds like someone running a finger along the teeth of a comb. The call of the American toad is a monotone trill.



Chorus frog (Photo by Adopt-A-Pond)

About mid-spring, **leopard frogs** can be heard—the male's call is a low snore followed by several grunts. In late spring, **green frogs** and **gray tree frogs** begin to sing. Most people are familiar with the twangy "gung" of the green frog. The gray tree frog has a short flutey call.

Last on the scene are the **bullfrogs** with the characteristic deep growly "jug-o-rum"

You can expect to hear all of the above frogs at the sanctuary. A couple of other frogs are listed

for this area but are uncommon: the **mink frog** and the **pickerel frog**.

If your interest has been piqued, and you would like to listen to the night songs at the sanctuary, please contact me at 232-2902 or by email

dcrook@ca.inter.net

To listen to the frogs at home, go to:

www.naturewatch.ca/english/frogwatch/on/intro.html

For other sites, check out the Links on the Duck Club's website.

The Turtles of Shirley's Bay

By Bill Bower

It's that time of year again when we start seeing turtles crossing our roads or find them wandering the fields when we are out for a walk. Almost every turtle we see on land at the sanctuary will be a female out looking for a suitable place to lay her eggs. They especially like gravel and sand and can be found on our roads and road shoulders (unfortunately) digging holes and laying their eggs.

Just what species can we expect to find when we are walking, or maybe driving around? Well, Ontario is blessed with eight species of turtle, but you won't find them all out at the sanctuary. There are three species that are usually seen each spring. Our most well known and most colourful is the **midland painted turtle**. The carapace (top shell) is olive, smooth, flattened and unkeeled. It has yellow and red stripes on the neck, legs and tail. The plastron (breastplate) is also yellow with the dark blotch down the middle. This turtle, which can grow to eight inches or more in length, likes plant-filled ponds, lakes and streams and is often seen in groups basking on logs and rocks. It eats mainly insects, snails and vegetation. The five or so eggs that the female lays in the spring will usually hatch in August or September, but under certain conditions the hatchlings will stay in the nest until the following spring.



Painted turtle (Photo by Nova Scotia Museum)

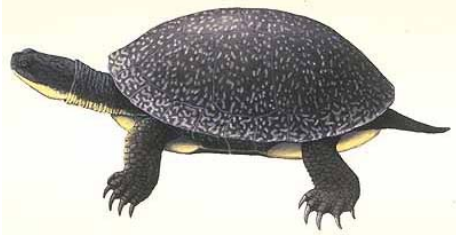
Our largest turtle is the **common snapping turtle** (the snapper). The carapace is dark coloured, bearing three rows of keels and serrated toward the back. The tail can be as long as the plastron. The female, which can grow up to 18 inches long, could be encountered almost anywhere in the sanctuary during the spring. Once a suitable spot has been found, she will lay from 25 to 50 eggs (sometimes more). While the actual incubation period will depend on weather conditions, hatchlings appear in the fall when they leave the nest and head for the nearest source of water. Once they make it safely to water (the lucky ones), they will swim to the bottom and bury themselves in the mud. Predators include raccoons, fox, mink, gulls, snakes, great blue heron and pike.



Snapping turtle (Photo by Nova Scotia Museum)

Finally, if you are lucky, you might encounter a **Blanding's turtle**. This species has a high domed carapace that is covered with greyish yellow teardrop shaped spots. The plastron is yellow with black blotches and it has a long neck and a bright yellow chin and throat. They are sometimes called "box turtles" (by mistake) as the plastron is hinged, allowing them to partially close up their shell at the rear for protection. It is quite shy and secretive but can be spotted occasionally basking along ponds or streams on moss or grass hummocks. Females can grow to be over nine inches long and will lay from 10 to 14 eggs which will normally hatch in late

summer or early fall (55 to 70 days after they were laid).



Blanding's turtle (Photo by Nova Scotia Museum)

Don't expect to see a **spiny softshell turtle**, a **spotted turtle** or a **wood turtle**, but what about a **map turtle** or a **musk turtle** (stinkpot)? Just because we haven't found one in recent years doesn't mean they aren't around. They are found in and around the Ottawa River and that's where we're located. Map turtles are often found at Petrie Island so why wouldn't they be living at the sanctuary?

Keep your eyes open and try to avoid striking one with your vehicle. If you do encounter one on the road, try to move it off to one side (if safe to do so). Always move the turtle in the direction it is headed, even if that happens to be away from water. Female turtles can walk several hundred yards or even a few kilometres to find a suitable nesting place. More than likely they will follow the same route spring after spring. If you move it the wrong way it will simply cross the road again and continue on.

CHURCHY'S COLUMN

How many times have you heard about the early bird getting the worm—which is supposed to be a good thing, at least for the bird? I wonder how many of this year's early birds questioned the wisdom of that approach as they tried to dig worms out of the permafrost? A few of us celebrated Earth Day (April 22), out at the sanctuary wearing hats, gloves, and warm coats to protect us from an Arctic blast. Austin and Joe did some bonding out on the Kubota, while Bill and I rowed around the ponds, putting out the last (almost) of the floaties so the ducks and geese could get shelter from the snow that came the next day.

I was planning to do some in-depth research on **West Nile Virus** so that I could report to club members on this disease, but there has been so much coverage in the media lately I don't think I can add much of value to it. I did hear on CBC radio that the disease is spread by biting mosquitoes, so my advice is don't bite mosquitoes. If you must get your insect protein, stick to beetles, or butterflies. Definitely not dragonflies.

Seriously, take the usual precautions to reduce your chances of being bitten: wear loose-fitting, light-coloured clothing, expose as little skin as possible and use insect repellent with DEET (Health Canada recommends 30 per cent maximum) on whatever skin is exposed. And try to get out of the sanctuary before the mosquitoes become most active, that is, at dusk.

Ducks Unlimited Canada has useful information on their Web site, as do Health Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Health and the City of Ottawa.

Ontario Health says there is some evidence that a person can be infected by handling a dead bird, however the risk is thought to be low. Just to be safe, if you're handling one, wear gloves or use a plastic bag.

It's an ill wind that blows no good—I saw a half-page ad for *Off!* in the *Globe and Mail* recently.

I think I convinced Dale that the club should stock up on repellent to leave in the sheds for the forgetful among us (that includes me). And I will leave some of the information I have gathered there as well.

And remember most people will not get sick from being bitten—at least that's what they want us to believe.

Finally, I have been in touch with **Lara Van Loon**, the Ottawa Riverkeeper, and invited her to come out to the sanctuary for a visit, but so far, she hasn't taken up the invitation.

Churchy