

# Spotted Turtle

*Clemmys guttata*



Status: **Endangered**

## Threats:

- ◆ Habitat disturbance by humans
- ◆ Nest predation (raccoons)
- ◆ Extremely sensitive to water pollution and degradation of water quality
- ◆ Eggs have low hatching success
- ◆ Pet trade



## Description:

- ◆ Relatively small turtle: generally less than 13 cm in length
- ◆ Smooth black carapace with bright yellow or orange spots; spots fade in older turtles
- ◆ Plastron yellow-orange with large black blotch on each scute
- ◆ Males have tan chin and brown eyes; females have yellow chin and orange eyes
- ◆ Head, neck, limbs and tail are grey to black with yellow spots; inside of legs washed with orange

## Biology:

- ◆ Emerge from hibernation in April and spend most of their time basking in the sun
- ◆ Breed in aquatic habitats from May to early June, often in the same sites year after year
- ◆ Nesting often takes place at night, from mid-late June
- ◆ Lays 3-8 oval, white, flexible-shelled, leathery eggs in leaves, soil and leaf litter in wooded areas and along banks of wetland areas
- ◆ Are omnivores: eats aquatic plants, slugs, insects, tadpoles, small fish

## Habitat:

- ◆ Lives in ponds, marshes, bogs with an abundant supply of aquatic vegetation
- ◆ Most active in spring; often seen basking in groups on tufts of vegetation in shallow water
- ◆ Females dig nests on land in sites with sun exposure
- ◆ Often returns to nesting sites, which can be communal
- ◆ Spotted turtles often hibernate in groups and in the same spot each year

Species at Risk  
STEWARDS' GUIDE SERIES

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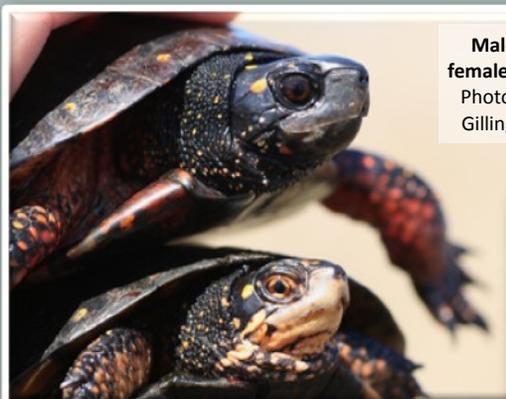
*Turtle on the road?  
Here's How  
You Can Help:*

### Spotted Turtle on Your Property? *Here's What You Can Do:*

- ◆ Protect nest sites by observing from a distance. Nesting season in Ontario is from May to June. Female turtles generally lay eggs every other year and dig their nests and lay their eggs in shallow soil and cover them with moss, lichens, or leaves. Eggs hatch about 80 days after they are laid.
- ◆ Spotted turtles often use the same sites for mating, nesting, basking, and hibernation. This makes it especially important to protect these sites. Since these activities are also usually done in groups, Spotted turtles are more vulnerable if these sites are threatened.
- ◆ Keep your wetlands intact! Spotted turtles and other animals depend on this valuable habitat.
- ◆ Sit back, relax, and enjoy knowing you have provided suitable habitat for one of Ontario's precious turtles!
- ◆ **See a turtle?** Tell Turtle Tally! If you see an at risk turtle (live or dead) submit your sighting to Ontario Turtle Tally: [www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/TurtleTally.asp](http://www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/TurtleTally.asp). You can also submit your sighting to the Natural Heritage Information Centre at [nhic.mnr.gov.on.ca/MNR/nhic/species/species\\_report.cfm](http://nhic.mnr.gov.on.ca/MNR/nhic/species/species_report.cfm). Every turtle sighting you report helps protect Ontario's turtles and the places they live.



Photo: Scott Gillingwater



**Male top,  
female bottom**  
Photo: Scott  
Gillingwater



Photo: Scott Gillingwater

◆ **Learn more.** Check out the Species at Risk section on the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources website at [www.mnr.gov.on.ca](http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca).

- ◆ Watch for traffic! Make sure it is safe to pull over and help the turtle without putting yourself at risk.
- ◆ Move the turtle in the direction it's going. If you don't, it will probably turn around and try again.
- ◆ Don't lift a turtle by its tail. Turtles are heavy; you could dislocate vertebrae. Don't drag turtles - they get road rash!
- ◆ A turtle smaller than a dinner plate can be picked up by the shell. Grasp the shell on either side of the tail at 5 and 7 o'clock. If you have gloves, wear them.
- ◆ Larger turtles are more challenging. If possible, toss a towel or blanket over its head. Turtles that can't see you, can't bite you. The turtle can then be picked up in the same way as above.
- ◆ If you can't lift it and have a shovel handy, try gently sliding the shovel under the back end of the turtle. You can then either shovel the turtle onto a second blanket and drag it across the road or slowly push the turtle across the road on the shovel. If using a shovel to move a turtle, keep it very low to the ground in case the turtle moves.
- ◆ Most turtles will pee on you when handled. Hold them away from your body.
- ◆ It is best not to move a turtle from the general area where it is attempting to cross the road. Turtles do make overland movements away from wetlands; however, if the area is highly developed or the risk of the turtle moving onto another road is high, then moving the turtle to the nearest wetland is probably the best option.
- ◆ Wash your hands after handling a turtle.