

# Eastern Musk Turtle

*Sternotherus odoratus*



Status: **Threatened**



Photo: Scott Gillingwater

## Threats:

- ◆ Development along shorelines (habitat destruction)
- ◆ Death from fishing and boat propellers (due to habit of basking at water surface rather than on land)

## Description:

- ◆ Also called the Stinkpot turtle
- ◆ Maximum length of about 13 cm: one of the smallest Ontario turtles
- ◆ Adult has two bright yellow stripes along the side of the head
- ◆ Dark-coloured carapace that is typically algae covered

Photo: Scott Gillingwater



## Biology:

- ◆ Emits musky smell if disturbed
- ◆ Diet: insects, minnows, carrion, fish eggs
- ◆ Females lay eggs on open ground or in small excavations in decaying vegetation or rotting wood, usually within 50 metres of water
- ◆ Eggs are laid in June or July, but not every year
- ◆ Females return to the same vicinity year after year to lay eggs
- ◆ Are very shy and secretive and are rarely observed except when searched for
- ◆ Are mostly nocturnal

## Habitat:

- ◆ Spends most of its time in shallow, slow moving water walking along the bottom. Rarely leaves water, even to bask
- ◆ Hibernates underwater, burying itself in mud when the water is colder than 10 °C

Species at Risk  
STEWARDS' GUIDE SERIES

# Eastern Musk Turtle

*Sternotherus odoratus*

## STEWARDS' GUIDE SERIES

Status: **Threatened**



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

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

- ◆ Protect nest sites by observing from a distance. Nesting season in Ontario is in June and July; eggs hatch at the end of summer. Female turtles make their nests and lay their eggs on open land.
- ◆ Keep nesting sites in tact for next year. Eastern Musk turtles often return year after year, although they don't always lay eggs each year.
- ◆ Don't cover turtle nests: they need specific temperatures if hatching is to be successful. Covering the nest could result in cooler temperatures and the eggs might not have time to hatch before the fall freeze.
- ◆ Most stinkpot turtles are adults. While these turtles generally live long lives, nesting and hatchling survival rates are low. This makes it even more important to protect the nests of these turtles.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ **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).



Photo: Scott Gillingwater



Photo: Scott Gillingwater

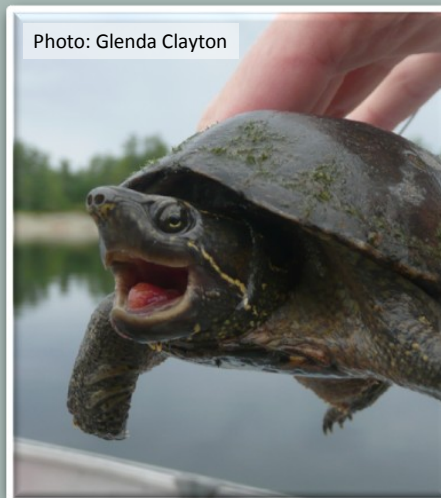


Photo: Glenda Clayton

- ◆ 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.