

Community walks for turtles



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By Nate Smelle

The Land Between and Think Turtle Conservation Initiative held their second annual Turtle Walk in Bancroft on the morning of Saturday, June 8. The 35 participants in this year's walk gathered at Riverside Park where the organizers had set up an information tent and sign-making station. There was also a best turtle costume competition, which many of the walkers enthusiastically took part in.

One of the event's organizers Kelly Wallace said the annual fundraising initiative is also intended to raise awareness that turtles are active at this time of year. Now in the peak of nesting season, Wallace said every day there are more and more turtles on the move. "If it's warm they will start coming out at the end of March and into April, but this year they're just starting to show up," she said. "It's very late this year. Not last Sunday, but the one before that I drove a two-kilometre stretch on my way home and I found nine turtles. One I was able to help, six I sent to the trauma centre, and the others we're sadly road-kill."

Already this season, Wallace said the Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre has taken in more than 300 injured turtles. She said her phone has been ringing steady with people requesting Watch for Turtles signs, reporting injured turtles and nesting sites in need of protection.

Prior to the walk, The Land Between's citizen science manager Ally Lahey took a few moments to share some interesting information about turtles and turtle conservation with the crowd while reminding them that turtles in Ontario and around the world are in danger of going extinct. In collaboration with Turtle Guardians from various conservation groups throughout the province, she said The Land Between has identified 970 turtle tunnel sites on county roads alone.

"The land between bio-region from the Ottawa Valley to Georgian Bay is home to one-third of Ontario's turtles," said Lahey.

"It is a place of hope, and it is a place where we can make a difference for the future of turtles, lakes and all our wildlife.

Acknowledging that all species of turtles in Ontario are at risk of disappearing, she continued "It is time to stand up for wildlife and give back to Nature for all that it gives us. We can continue to help turtles by becoming a Turtle Guardian and by monitoring turtles and turtle habitat, building tunnels and helping with Outreach and events."

The 2nd annual Turtle Walk, T5 Campaign was organized by Turtle Guardians in partnership with The Land Between, Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre, Scales Nature Park, S.T.A.R.T. Turtle Project, Curve Lake Cultural Centre, Ontario Nature, Toronto Zoo, Trillium Lakelands District School Board, Ontario Trillium Foundation, Road Less Traveled Academy, Esri Canada and Eco-Kare International. Those who missed out on this year's walk in Bancroft can take part in Turtle Walks being held in Fenelon Falls, Bracebridge, Lindsay and Orono on Saturday, June 15.

Wallace reminds people that when stopping to help a turtle across the road, or to retrieve an injured turtle it is vital to ensure their own safety, as well as the safety of passengers and fellow motorists on the road. She said it is also very important to always move the turtle in the direction the it was headed. To report an injured turtle, Wallace advises the public to call the Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre at 705-741-5000.