

Expert hosts turtle nest protector workshop



Think Turtle Conservation Initiative's Kelly Wallace walks spectators through different types of turtle nest protectors. / SARAH SOBANSKI Staff

By Sarah Sobanski

Turtle nesting season is around the corner ? a friendly reminder from your area turtle specialist, [Think Turtle Conservation Initiative](#)'s Kelly Wallace.

Wallace says with the late thaw it's anyone's guess when turtles will be laying their eggs. It's usually between May 15 and July 15, but this year it could be later.

Either way, nesting season is up and coming. That's why Wallace decided to host a nest protector information session at the Faraday Community Centre April 25. She said if you see a turtle lay her eggs and you have the ability to monitor it, you should protect it with a nest protector.

Turtles will lay their eggs in the early morning hours because they like the cooler temperatures, said Wallace.

?Always mark the nest,? she said. ?No matter how great your memory is, it all looks the same once you put down the dirt.?

Wallace said protecting a nest can be as easy as laying mesh wiring over top of the nest and anchoring it with heavy rocks. Or it can be as complicated as building a wood and mesh protector with a door to the water for when the hatchlings appear.

?The thing about a lot of this is to get creative, use what works,? said Wallace.

She recommended three-by-eight inch mesh wiring so smaller predators such as snakes couldn't get through to the eggs.

For larger predators such as raccoons and skunks, it's important to tightly anchor the nest protector. She said this can be done by using stakes, repurposed ski poles, rocks or anything that can be found around the house. She asked people make sure they anchor a wide circumference around the nests ? careful of possible vibrations that could damage the sensitive eggs.

?Make it as difficult as possible [for the predators],? she said. But make sure the nest can still get plenty of sunshine.

The temperature of the nest is crucial during their 60- to 90-day incubation period, Wallace said. Higher temperatures have been shown to affect the gender of the turtle, producing more females. Cooler temperatures, such as those in the area last summer, produce more males.

When building and placing the nest protector, Wallace recommended using your hands, not gloves, to mask the nest's scent with your own. She said the turtle's scent can be further dispersed by sprinkling water over the nest. The nest's scent is what attracts predators.

You're also going to want to be conscious of where the turtle is nesting, Wallace said. She asked that people keep their eye out for turtles nesting in their driveways, near their properties or on road shoulders.

A turtle can lay its eggs in a few hours, she said, but her eggs will spend the next 21 days hardening. That's when they're most vulnerable.

?If you see a turtle nesting on a kids' playground ? there was a case last year where a turtle was nesting on a baseball field ? call the [Kawartha Turtle] Trauma Centre,? said Wallace noting its phone number, 705-741-5000. The number will also connect to the

Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre.

Wallace recommended calling the centre if you see nests in precarious places so that they can be excavated and put into a hatchling program. Heavy vibrations, such as those from car tires, can disrupt the eggs. She said hatchling programs will return turtles to the lakes they came from.

?It's so important they return to their point of origin,? Wallace said noting many people had told her they dug up eggs themselves and moved them. She warned against this.

?You have to leave the eggs alone,? she stressed. ?If you have a concern, call the Trauma Centre.?

If you see a turtle you should report it to the Ontario Turtle Tally or the Ontario Reptile and Amphibian Atlas Project, Wallace said, so these environmental sciences organizations can keep better track of turtle populations and work to protect them.