

Amphibians and Reptiles At-Risk



Many forests and wetlands across Ontario have been destroyed. The loss of wetlands is particularly devastating to reptiles and amphibians who rely on these habitats for at least one part of their life-cycle. Wetlands are often separated from one another by buildings, roads and highways. Many reptiles and amphibians as they try to move from one area of their habitat to another.

Snakes, in turn, are terribly misunderstood. Some people are afraid of them, thinking that they are slimy and dangerous, when in fact, they aren't! Only the eastern Massasauga rattlesnake is poisonous. And even though it could bite you,

it would much rather escape under a bush! The extirpation (permanent loss of a species in a particular region or area) of the timber rattlesnake from Canada and the reduced range of the eastern Massasauga rattlesnake is a result of people's needless persecution of these creatures.

Toxins in our environment also have a devastating effect on reptiles and amphibians. Chemicals such as PCBs, dioxins and furans, used in various industrial processes, affect the ability of reptiles and amphibians to reproduce by damaging to their eggs.

What you can do to help reptiles and amphibians

Give 'em space. Reptiles and amphibians, along with most other species, are losing their natural habitat across Ontario. Shrubs, long grasses, rock piles and decaying logs provided ideal habitat for many of these species. Leave some of these areas undisturbed in your backyard, and Ontario's nature will thank you.

Give 'em a brake! Many reptiles and amphibians die each year on our roads and highways. Basking in the warmth of the sun, they are unaware of the danger of remaining on the warm pavement. Watch out for snakes and turtles along the road and, when safe, try to nudge them back into their regular habitat.

Amphibian Antics and Reptile Round-Up

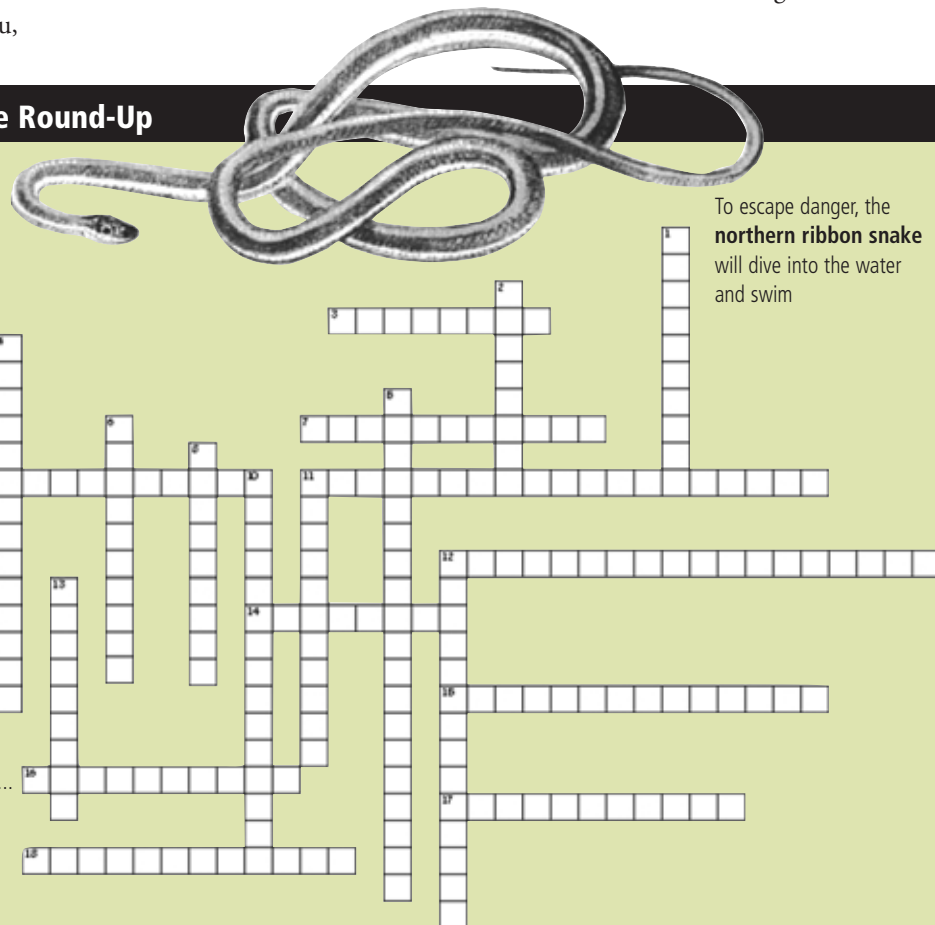
All answers can be found in the Nature Note. Good luck!

ACROSS

3. Ontario's largest frog
7. Cold-blooded
9. Thin snake, dives to avoid danger
11. Colour-changing frog
12. Ontario's only rattlesnake
14. Lays shelled eggs
15. Young called Red Eft
16. Deepest harbour in the World
17. Sixth Great Lake
18. Sleigh bell call

DOWN

1. Also called Stinkpot Turtle
2. Frosty frog found in far north
4. Ontario's only lizard
5. Snoring & clucking noise
6. Largest freshwater island
8. Reptile never asks for directions. Common...
10. 2nd largest snake in Ontario
11. Permanent loss of species in area
12. Plays dead if threatened
13. Two lives



To escape danger, the northern ribbon snake will dive into the water and swim

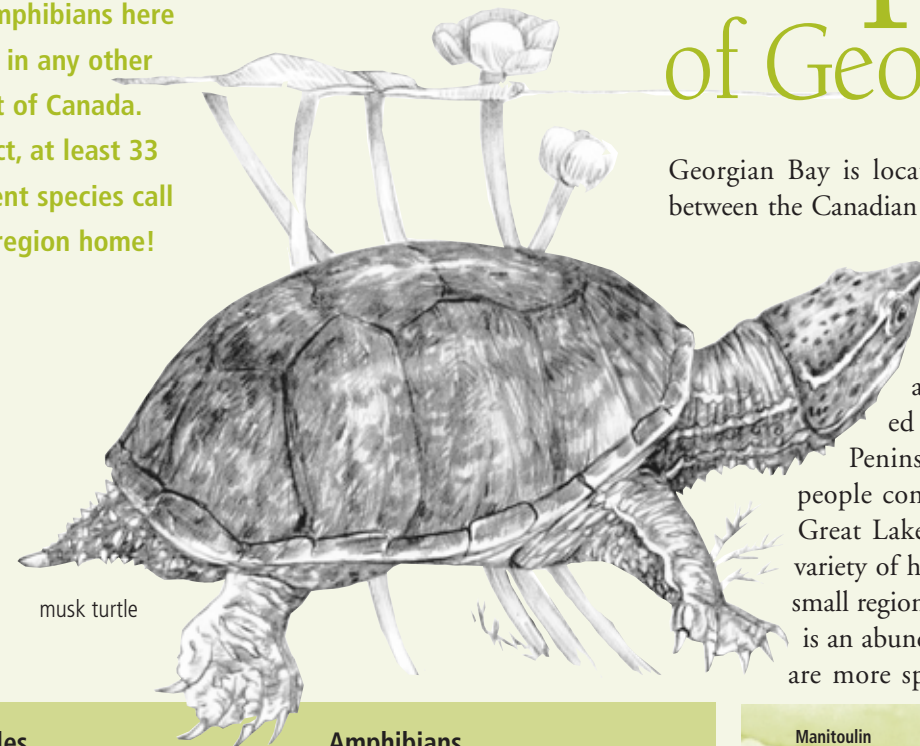
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grey tree frog

There are more species of reptiles and amphibians here than in any other part of Canada. In fact, at least 33 different species call this region home!

awesome Amphibians and Reptiles of Georgian Bay



musk turtle

Georgian Bay is located east of Lake Huron, nestled between the Canadian Shield in the north and the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Lowlands in the south. Wetlands, rocky outcrops, and woodlands can all be found here. Due to its large size and the fact that it is nearly separated from Lake Huron by the Bruce Peninsula and Manitoulin Island, some people consider Georgian Bay to be a sixth Great Lake. Because of the uniqueness and variety of habitats found within this relatively small region and among its many islands there is an abundance of plants and animals. There are more species of reptiles and amphibians

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Did you know... Georgian Bay contains the world's largest freshwater island, Manitoulin Island, and the world's deepest harbour, Parry Sound!

Reptiles

(snakes, turtles and skinks)

- are covered with either scales or a shell
- their skin is dry
- sharp teeth or beaks (turtles)
- sharp claws (except snakes),
- most lay eggs but some species bear live young



Amphibians

(frogs, toads and salamanders)

- have smooth, moist skin
- smaller, less developed teeth
- no claws
- lay jelly-covered eggs in water



leopard frog

A unique habitat

It is hard to believe that wildlife can survive on the seemingly desolate rocky outcrops on Georgian Bay's islands. This unique habitat is ideal for many species of amphibians reptiles. Turtles and snakes can often be seen sunning themselves on the warm rocks. Reptiles are cold blooded (ectothermic), which means that their body temperature is controlled by the outside air temperature. A reptile's dark scales or shell helps it absorb the sun's rays which, in turn, warms its body. The rocky landscape of this region holds heat just like a sidewalk in the summer. If a reptile doesn't get enough sunlight, it becomes cold and sluggish.

Heading to the Georgian Bay area for a vacation?

Take the mini field guide along to help you identify some of the region's unique amphibians and reptiles. Even better, make a photocopy of the cards and staple them together to make your own field guide. You might want to include some blank pages so you can sketch your findings!

Musk Turtle (shown on front page)

The musk turtle is also called a stinkpot turtle because of the musky, smelly odour that it gives off when frightened or handled.

Habitat: Slow moving, shallow water in marshes and lakes.

Description: This small turtle is less than 13 centimetres long. Its brown shell with black flecks is a contrast to its belly which is a brighter yellow and black. Two light coloured stripes are located on either side of its dark head and its chin and throat have what appear to be fleshy whiskers.

Wow: The musk turtle can reach the ripe old age of 50 years!

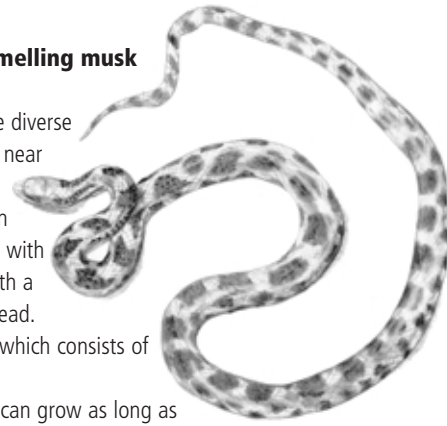
Eastern Fox Snake

This constrictor gets its name from the fox-smelling musk that it gives off when threatened.

Habitat: The eastern fox snake takes advantage of the diverse landscapes in the Georgian Bay area and can be found near marshes, sand dunes and beaches.

Description: Yellow-brown in colour with large brown or black blotches running along the back that alternate with a series of lateral smaller blotches. Its belly is yellow with a black checkboard pattern and it has a reddish-brown head. As a constrictor, the eastern fox snake crushes its prey, which consists of small rodents, birds and amphibians.

Wow: This is the second largest snake in Ontario, and can grow as long as 140 centimetres (that's about as long as you are tall)!

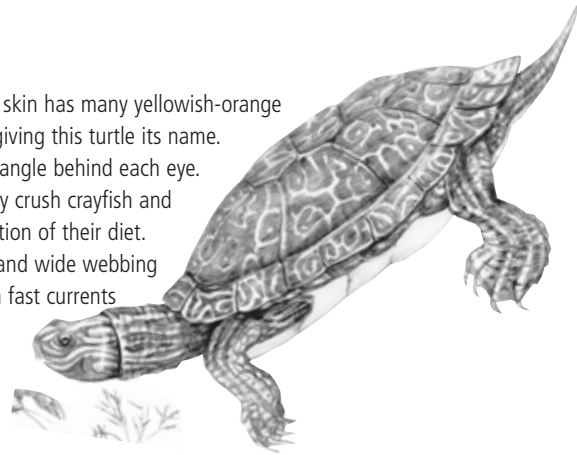


Common Map Turtle

Habitat: Large bodies of water.

Description: Its olive-brown shell and skin has many yellowish-orange lines on it, like contour lines on a map, giving this turtle its name. Most map turtles have a small yellow triangle behind each eye. They have powerful jaws with which they crush crayfish and other molluscs that make up a large portion of their diet.

Wow: Because of their strong muscles and wide webbing on their feet, the map turtle can swim in fast currents of large rivers where most other turtles cannot.

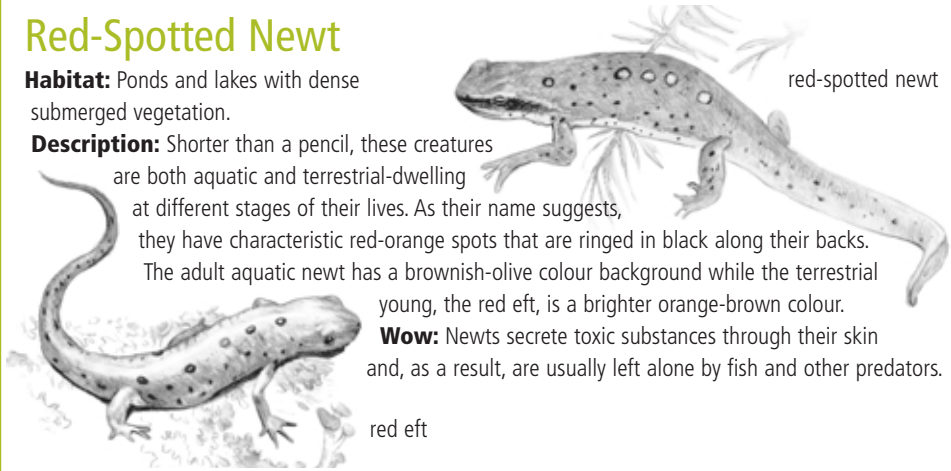


Red-Spotted Newt

Habitat: Ponds and lakes with dense submerged vegetation.

Description: Shorter than a pencil, these creatures are both aquatic and terrestrial-dwelling at different stages of their lives. As their name suggests, they have characteristic red-orange spots that are ringed in black along their backs. The adult aquatic newt has a brownish-olive colour background while the terrestrial young, the red eft, is a brighter orange-brown colour.

Wow: Newts secrete toxic substances through their skin and, as a result, are usually left alone by fish and other predators.



Northern Leopard Frog

(shown on front page)

Habitat: Lightly wooded areas near freshwater.

Description: This medium-sized frog gets its name from the irregularly placed black spots around its green-brown body.

Adults will eat just about anything that they can catch, including insects, spiders, small mice and fish.

Wow: Its call is a combination of about three seconds of a low snoring noise, followed by clucking. When disturbed, the leopard frog will leap away in a zig-zag movement and try to escape to the safety of water.

Eastern Grey Tree Frog

(shown on front page)

Habitat: Although found in small ponds or near other water sources during the breeding season, the eastern grey tree frog spends most of its time in trees so it can be difficult to spot.

Description: The grey tree frog has small disks on the ends of its fingers and toes that allow it to cling to nearly any vertical surface. They feed on small insects, spiders and snails.

Wow: This medium-sized frog's colour is dependent on its immediate surroundings. It can change its colour from green to grey to nearly white in order to hide from predators!

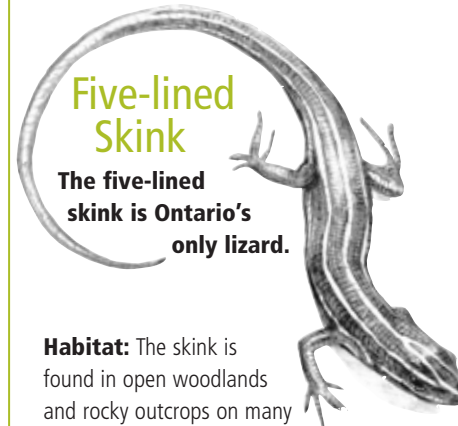
Five-lined Skink

The five-lined skink is Ontario's only lizard.

Habitat: The skink is found in open woodlands and rocky outcrops on many of the islands in Georgian Bay.

Description: As its name suggests, this lizard has five yellowish-cream coloured stripes running down its back from nose to tail. The background colour may be black, brown or even olive. Juveniles have bright blue tails but the females may also retain a bluish tinge. Adult males have a reddish or orange coloured jaw. Adults are up to 20 centimetres long and feed mainly on insects and spiders.

Wow: A skink's tail can drop off — which can be useful when trying to escape from predators — and a new, smaller one, will grow back in its place.



Spring Peeper

Habitat: Wooded areas near a source of water, such as a wetland.

Description: This tiny brown-grey frog is only about 2.5 centimetres long (about the size of a quarter) with a characteristic X on its back. Like the grey tree frog, the spring peeper has large toe pads that allow it to cling to vertical surfaces.

Wow: Its shrill, high-pitched call sounds much like sleigh bells and is considered to be one of the first signs of spring.

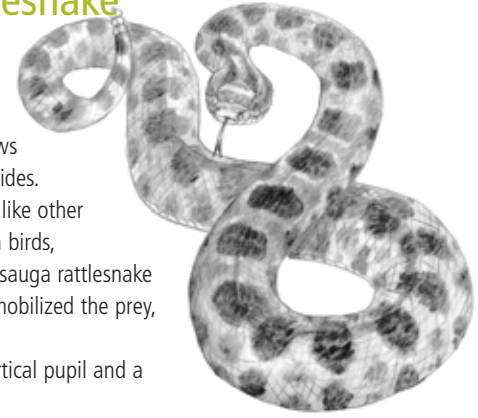
Eastern Massassauga Rattlesnake

This is Ontario's only rattlesnake and is on the Canadian Endangered Species List.

Habitat: Mixed forests and rocky outcrops.

Description: Grey-brown in colour with several rows of black blotches, ringed in grey along its back and sides. The underside is black. Its thick tail does not narrow like other snakes but has a rattle, giving it its name. It feeds on birds, amphibians, insects and small mammals. The Massassauga rattlesnake injects its prey with venom. Once the venom has immobilized the prey, the snake swallows it whole.

Wow: This is the only snake in the region with a vertical pupil and a



Bull Frog

Habitat: Deep ponds and lakes.

Description: This gentle giant, at a length of over 15 centimetres, is Ontario's largest frog. They are usually a dull greenish-brown but may be nearly black in colour. They have no distinctive patterns but their size is usually enough to make a positive identification. In the spring, you can hear their familiar "jug-o-rum, jug-o-rum" call.

Wow: It takes approximately three years for a bullfrog's eggs to undergo metamorphosis and turn into tadpoles while for most other amphibian species, this process takes less than two weeks.



Wood Frog

Habitat: Although they are primarily terrestrial, these frogs are never far from water and can be found in marshes, wet meadows and open grassy areas.

Description: This medium-sized brown-grey frog has a distinctive black triangular mask running between its eyes and along the side of its head. Its call sounds much like the quacking of a duck.

Wow: Wood frogs are found throughout every province and territory of Canada and are the only amphibian that is able to live north of the Arctic Circle. Now that's a cold blooded creature!



Eastern Hognose Snake

Habitat: Usually found near a source of water, these snakes can be seen in open fields, mixed forests and meadows.

Description: Its wide head and turned-up snout give this snake its name.

These snakes can be a wide variety of colours.

Some are solid grey, brown or black while others have large dark blotches down their backs and smaller dark spots on their sides. Its thick body reaches lengths of between 50 and 84 centimetres.

Wow: When threatened, the hognose will raise its head and neck off the ground and flatten its head to look cobra-like. It may hiss and strike at its aggressor. If it still feels threatened, it will play dead by turning upside down with its mouth hanging open.

