

Spotted Turtles Need YOU

By Bob Barnett

Everyone loves to see turtles basking on a log. Spotted Turtles must be very shy. They only come out of the water in the spring to find a nice mate, then they return to their pond. The only one I've ever seen was pulled out of a pond by John Urquhart who knew exactly where to look. John runs Blazing Star Environmental and has had years of experience with Ontario Nature and recently as a consultant studying reptiles.

Spotted Turtles are one of Ontario's 113 endangered species among 234 species considered at risk. In 1990 there were 130 known sites where they'd been identified. By 2008 that number had dropped to only 30 sites. This is a very rare animal. So rare that researchers keep extremely quiet about those 30 sites.

When John and I found the turtle, we were out to inventory a vacant shoreline property that Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy (EBC) had been offered at half price. Fortunately, we had John with us that day! The owner and his sister are willing to give half the value as a donation if we can raise the other half. Right now we need \$115,000 to seal the deal. Our planner, Don Scott, has confirmed that a cottage could be built on the three-acre property, so the value is \$250,000 according to our appraiser, Dan Laven.

Why Nature Reserves?

Some people wonder why we create nature reserves. My father, an architect, kept

asking, "What are you going to do with all that land?" I try to explain that we don't do much with the land, but the land does a lot for us. It provides a whole spectrum of "ecosystem" services. The wetlands on our 180 nature reserves prevent floods and purify water before it gets into the fishing streams and aquifers which provide drinking water for Ontario towns. I mention that our millions of trees strip carbon molecules from the air and put pure oxygen back out for us to breathe. I say that those trees, shrubs and plants absorb 70,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide annually. Tens of thousands of people visit our reserves annually to experience the improved health you get in nature while contributing millions to local economies. EBC lands protect \$26 million of ecosystem services every year. No one pays us to do that. It may be that our efforts are sometimes undervalued by governments.

Economic Value

The hard part is explaining why providing habitat for 60 species of conservation concern has economic

value. Economists have studied this and found, by survey, that people would be willing to spend money to ensure that elephants, tigers, Polar Bears and even Spotted Turtles continue to share the earth with them.

This is your own opportunity to share the earth with a Spotted Turtle and protect one of Ontario's endangered species. We feel loss if our natural heritage goes extinct. Spotted Turtles are harmless and cute.

Make a Difference

We know that people like something they can purchase, touch and care for. We have sourced endangered Wood Poppy seeds and are offering those seeds to donors to our turtle campaign. You get to protect two species in tandem. You can have Wood Poppies in your own garden or if you prefer, Milkweed to attract Monarch Butterflies. Donors who would like them, can ask for Milkweed seeds to attract, feed and house Monarch

Butterflies for planting this fall or Wood Poppy seeds for delivery and planting in the spring. Sorry, but we can't give you a Spotted Turtle. They are protected by the most stringent Ontario regulations. If you become a core donor and ensure we get to purchase the property, we can show you the pond and give you more of the details.

This is your chance to make a real difference. You can help Spotted Turtles on line at www.escarpment.ca, by sending a cheque payable to Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy, 503 Davenport Road, Toronto, M4V 1B8, by requesting a securities donation form or, best of all, just give me a call at 888.815.9575 to discuss it or contribute using your credit card. You will get a charitable tax receipt.

Bob Barnett and Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy can be reached online at www.escarpment.ca, by Facebook or telephone at 888.815.9575 or email rbarnett@escarpment.ca.



▲ Endangered Spotted Turtle. PHOTO BY JOE CROWLEY, ONTARIO MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND FORESTRY.

Pond where the Spotted Turtle was found. PHOTO BY BOB BARNETT.

