

YEAR END FUNDER REPORT



The Ganawenim Meshkiki Eastern Georgian Bay Initiative



2785 Television Rd. Peterborough. On. K9L 1E9 www.ontarioturtle.ca,
info@ontarioturtle.ca
705-741-5000 Charitable Registration # 85752 4409 RR0001

The Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre respectfully acknowledges that it is situated on the treaty and traditional territory of the Michi Saagiig Anishnaabeg. We offer our gratitude to the First Peoples for their care for, and teachings about our earth and our relations.

YPrepared by Tracey Murfin
December 2025

Project Overview

Our Mission is to strengthen and preserve Canada's native turtle population and the habitats in which they live.

In 2025, the Ganawenim Meshkiki Eastern Georgian Bay Initiative partnered with OTCC through providing \$25,000 as the second year installment of a three year grant. The focus of this initiative is to implement our comprehensive multipronged project to mitigate threats and reverse declining populations of at-risk turtle species in the Eastern Georgian Bay Region (specifically target species including Blanding's, Eastern Musk and Spotted turtles).

The following provides the 2025 project activities, milestones and outcomes and an overall summary of the work of OTCC through the year.

Rehabilitation of Injured At-riskTurtles and Release to Source Wetlands



As of the end of November 2025, 2253 injured turtles have been admitted to OTCC from across Ontario. **177 injured turtles were admitted from the EGBR including 44 Blanding's turtles.**

The length of time turtles are required to remain in OTCC's hospital depends on the severity of the injuries and when they arrive. Turtles that arrive early in the season with minor injuries are released back to their home wetlands as soon as possible, however turtles with injuries that require longer recovery and treatment as well as turtles who are admitted at the end of the season will remain in our care until the following spring.

Our First Responder Veterinary Program is essential in ensuring that injured animals get the emergency care they need as soon as possible to minimize their suffering and increasing the chances of survival. We have 46 first responder veterinarians from across Ontario who stabilize the injured turtles locally so they can be safely transported to our Peterborough hospital. **There are presently 7 active First Responders in the EGBR.**

In 2025, our veterinary staff trained an additional 5 new first responder veterinarians (**3 in the EGBR**), and offered over 40 hours of training and support to our existing first responder vet clinics from across Ontario. As a teaching hospital, over 180 hours were dedicated to the training and mentoring of 11 vet students over 15 weeks and an additional 200 hours supporting 2 vet tech coop placement students. This is on top of treating and caring for the over 2200 turtles admitted to our care as well as the hatchlings which are often head started over the winter and released in the spring.

We could not do the work we do without the hundreds of committed volunteers who feed, clean and transport turtles. OTCC is proud to have a pool of 1610 volunteers who act as turtle taxis transporting injured turtles from across Ontario to our Peterborough hospital. 289,182 kms were driven by our turtle taxi drivers in 2025 **including 15,374 kms in the EGBR**. This requires significant commitment and coordination provided by our turtle taxi and hot line staff. Additionally, 63 in house turtle care volunteers feed and clean the hundreds of turtles in our care, and staff and volunteers help to release the hatchlings and healed turtles back to their source wetlands across Ontario.

In 2025, we were able to release 4083 turtles (including hatchlings) back to their source wetlands. **398 turtles were released in the EGBR**. A healthy turtle population in wetlands help to keep the wetlands healthy, and this is important to everyone not just as the turtle's home, but as a source of our drinking water. Turtles have a vital role in wetlands including being the official clean up crew as they eat decaying matter of all types.



A snapping turtle hatchling, a very large snapping turtle and a blanding's turtle (with the help of Kelsey our education assistant) being released!



Egg Incubation and “Headstarting”



Many of the injured turtles admitted to our hospital are females with eggs. As of the end of November, 2025 9004 eggs have/are being incubated. To date, 3476 hatchlings have arrived with possibly a few more late bloomers to arrive in the next few weeks. **579 eggs resulting in 236 hatchlings so far from the EGBR.** The hatchlings presently in our facility will be headstarted over the winter and released to their mother's source wetland in the spring.

This headstarting program saves these eggs that would otherwise have been lost and gives the hatchlings a 'head start' in life. These hatchlings are kept for varying amounts of time before being released back to the mother's wetlands. This strategy increases the chance of survival of the hatchlings considerably. In addition, it helps to increase the population of the specific location, thus helping to mitigate turtle mortality.

The sex of a turtle is determined by the temperature during incubation. Female turtles are hatched in slightly warmer conditions. At OTCC our goal is to incubate eggs in temperatures that allow for an equal population of male and female hatchlings. However, in species where we often only have females admitted to our hospital their eggs are incubated in temperatures to produce female hatchlings.



Some of our 2025 Hatchlings



Education and Stewardship



Education is an important part of our multi-pronged approach to conserve and protect Ontario's wetlands. We believe knowledge leads to action and stewardship, so we offer a variety of educational opportunities to the public both virtually and face to face. This programming includes our "Turtle encounter" and behind the scenes tours as well as our new multi- generational "Wildlife Conservation Through the Ages" program.

In August 2024, our onsite educational programming was put on hold as we moved to our new location and transitioned into our new facility. However, we continued to offer virtual educational programs and attended community events and spoke to community groups off site. Despite our move and transition over 12,000 individuals participated in 224 educational events through our educational programs.

This year we have continued our virtual educational programs and well as community outreach and events. On site formal tours and programming were on hold at the beginning of the year, but have started again. Our new facility and education centre has been open to the general public to drop in and tour the facility, see the hatchlings and watch what is happening in our hospital through the large viewing windows and, meet our ambassador non-releasable turtles. 13,498 individuals have participated in 143 educational events or toured the facility in 2025.



Some of our 2025 Events and Tours



Education Testimonials

In-person Visit, May 30, 2025

Seeing a surgery through the viewing window was fascinating!! What incredible work you do here to protect turtles.

Our guide was excellent, she has so much knowledge of the turtles and answered all the questions we had. Thanks for a great experience!!

In-person Visit, June 5, 2025

We loved seeing the baby turtles and didn't know they had such a low chance of survival in the wild.

You inspired my family! We learned so much and how to protect a turtle nest.

In-person Visit, June 19, 2025

We came away much more aware of the importance of the habitat that turtles live in and to protect wetlands to increase the survival of turtle populations.

We are inspired to learn more about turtles - all the types! Thank you!

In-person Workshop, June 24th, 2025

Our guide was very knowledgeable. Her enthusiastic way of informing us of all things turtle made for a delightful and educational experience!

Yes! We feel more prepared to help an injured turtle and what items to keep in our vehicle during the warm months.

Virtual Workshop, November 17th, 2025

The presentation helped us all to understand why turtles are so often injured on roads, and made us so much more confident in what to do if we see a turtle that needs help - understanding what tools to carry with us, what to do, and how easy it is for OTCC volunteers to get a turtle to the Centre made us eager to become part of this positive impact.

This was such an amazing opportunity to bring that passion and connection to our classmates who haven't had a ton of opportunities to understand and interact with the natural world.

Community Partnerships and Field Work

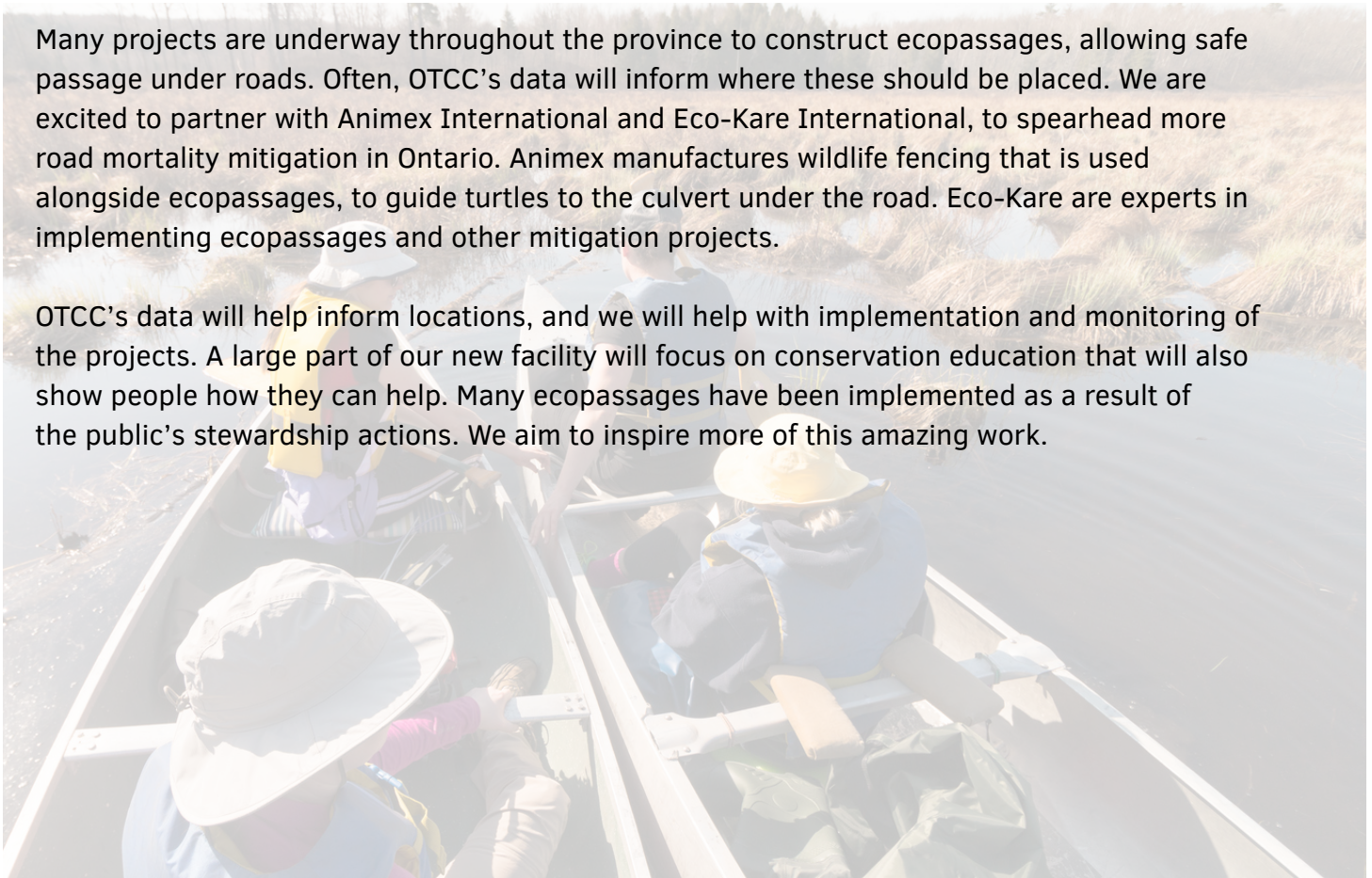
For 12 years we have conducted field work to establish the success of our headstarted turtles as compared to their wild-hatched counterparts by tracking them weekly during the summer months. With a focus on Blanding's turtles, we have successfully learned that our released headstarted turtles do as well as the wild-hatched ones of comparable size. This is incredible since the turtles released have had no prior acclimation and have not had the years of selection pressure that the wild-hatched ones have had.

The questions we wanted to answer with this study are whether they survive (ie is this conservation strategy worthwhile), how best to carry out the release, and do they reproduce normally in the wild. We have learned a lot about best practices for release strategy, and we transfer this knowledge to the other species we headstart and release, to maximize their success.

We will continue the study into the turtle's adulthood, to confirm their reproductive ability. However, we are transitioning the study into a less labour-intensive one – we will visit the site less frequently and for shorter periods, as the turtles age, as they don't need weekly monitoring anymore. In doing this, it will free up our field staff to take a greater part in on the ground road mortality mitigation, through our partnership with Animex International and Eco-Kare International.

Many projects are underway throughout the province to construct ecopassages, allowing safe passage under roads. Often, OTCC's data will inform where these should be placed. We are excited to partner with Animex International and Eco-Kare International, to spearhead more road mortality mitigation in Ontario. Animex manufactures wildlife fencing that is used alongside ecopassages, to guide turtles to the culvert under the road. Eco-Kare are experts in implementing ecopassages and other mitigation projects.

OTCC's data will help inform locations, and we will help with implementation and monitoring of the projects. A large part of our new facility will focus on conservation education that will also show people how they can help. Many ecopassages have been implemented as a result of the public's stewardship actions. We aim to inspire more of this amazing work.



Financial Summary

The funds provided by the Ganawenim Meshkiki Eastern Georgian Bay Initiative were allocated as follows:

The GMI Budget	Amount	Details
REVENUES		
GMI	\$25,000	2 nd year of 3yr grant
EXPENSES		
Vet.s and Vet Techs salaries and hospital supplies	\$12,600	portion of vets and vet techs salaries
Education programming	\$4,600	portion of salaries, supplies, communication and social media
Volunteer Coordination and Hotline	\$5,400	Portion of salaries
Administration	\$2,400	portion of office, operating and admin. costs
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$25,000	