



# SOUTHERN ONTARIO AT RISK REPTILES



*Spotted Turtle*



## Southern Ontario At Risk Reptiles (SOARR):

# Request for Funding Support

Southern Ontario At Risk Reptiles (SOARR) is a grassroots program that has grown to international importance, setting the bar for research and recovery of reptiles in Canada. We have developed a program that, for almost 30 years, has been a safeguard in preventing local extinctions of at-risk wildlife and helped species at risk across their ranges.

Funding needs be secured to carry out this important work. We are asking for your help in partnering with us to save our local Ontario species at risk, allowing us to take important steps toward the long-term survival of populations provincially, nationally, and internationally.

SOARR has unmatched experience and expertise and a proven track record, but the program needs secure financial backing to be sustainable. All contributions are tax deductible, and will ensure we can continue with this important work into the future. Through funding from community members, businesses, and others who are passionate about our natural world, we can ensure the survival of these remarkable, but often overlooked, denizens of Southern Ontario's wetlands, rivers, grasslands, and forests.



*Blanding's Turtle*

*Eastern Hog-nosed Snake*



*Northern Map Turtle*



*Queensnake*

## What is SOARR?

SOARR is one of the longest running and most successful reptile research and recovery programs in Canada. Initiated in 1994 to assess the status of the rapidly declining Spiny Softshell Turtle in southern Ontario, this program has since evolved to serve as a nationally and internationally recognized conservation program for a host of Threatened and Endangered reptiles across many habitat types.

Although our program focuses on southwestern Ontario, its impact is globally important. We work with some of the largest known populations of at-risk reptiles in North America, and thus our activities are necessary at an international level. We carry out much of our work throughout the Thames River watershed and along Lake Erie's rare coastal wetlands in southwestern Ontario. We also partner with various projects throughout many other areas of Ontario. This allows us a unique opportunity to affect change for a large number of species, their habitats and for the many communities along the way.

## Our Program

**Our activities are based on peer-reviewed recovery needs for each species:**

- We study and initiate recovery efforts for the largest remaining population of Spiny Softshell Turtle (Endangered) in Canada. Our extensive nest protection and habitat creation efforts have dramatically slowed the decline of this species along the Thames River, and have created new hope for the survival of this turtle in Canada.
- We have located, marked, and assessed the largest known populations of Spotted Turtle (Endangered) and Blanding's Turtle (Endangered) in Canada, and continue to enact measures to safeguard these globally important populations and their heavily impacted habitats.
- We carry out long-term research and habitat stewardship work on a number at-risk reptile species, including Queensnake (Endangered) and Eastern Hog-nosed Snake (Threatened). These harmless snakes have experienced unprecedented declines over the past few decades, due primarily to human-related threats. The Queensnake in particular is of great conservation concern due to its extremely low numbers in the province.
- In addition to research on various species, we also locate and artificially incubate thousands of turtle eggs from across southwestern Ontario, including Spiny Softshell, Northern Map, Blanding's, Snapping, and Midland Painted Turtles. Since all of Ontario's turtles are at some degree of risk, this large-scale effort is necessary to slow declines of all species.
- We partner with many groups and individuals, and have built working relationships with other Conservation Authorities, Salthaven Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Centre, Thames Talbot Land Trust, Ontario Nature, local First Nations, various community members, and many others to ensure we have the greatest reach possible.
- We have provided education and awareness presentations to tens of thousands of students, community members, and scientists, as well as reached hundreds of thousands of individuals through regional, provincial, and national news outlets. We unite communities in efforts to protect species in their own backyards, building capacity for long-term change and supporting local champions.
- We take on students, early career biologists, and community members, providing experience to these individuals for their future careers and the future of our environment.
- We work with scientists, governments, NGOs, planners, land managers, educators, and others to ensure the information we collect is used to provide positive and lasting change for species at risk.

# SOARR's Leader

Scott Gillingwater, Species At Risk Biologist, has been with the SOARR program since its inception in 1994. Since taking over as project leader in 2000, Scott has continued to build this program into what it is today, and is known Canada-wide for his innovative approaches to wildlife research and recovery.

Scott is, or has been, a member of multiple reptile and ecosystem-based recovery teams, the Committee On the Status of Endangered Wildlife In Canada (COSEWIC) Amphibians and Reptiles Specialist Subcommittee, the Committee On the Status of Species At Risk in Ontario (COSSARO), and the IUCN Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group. He is a co-founder of the Long Point Causeway Improvement Project, past Chair of the Spiny Softshell Turtle and Queensnake Recovery Teams, former President of the Canadian Herpetological Society, and is currently the Associate Editor for the journal *Herpetological Conservation and Biology*, among others. Scott has been awarded the W.H.H. Gunn Conservation Award, the Nature London Conservation Award, the CHS E.B.S. Logier Communications Award, the A.D. Latornell Conservation Pioneer Award, and Environment Canada's Environmental Citizenship Award for his long-term work with reptiles at risk.



Snapping Turtle



Spiny Softshell Hatchling



## The Time is Now

Species recovery isn't quick, and long term funding is unpredictable or not available at all. In order to carry out our efforts, we need your help. We are at a crossroads -- we have built the foundation and our successes can speak for themselves, but the next 10 years are vitally important. Turtles especially take many years to reach maturity, so we need to continue these efforts until hatchlings we've released begin to mature, start to nest on their own, and can sustain naturally viable populations. We hope that you will work with us to protect, recover, and ensure healthy populations into the future.

# What You can Expect

Your tax-deductible donation will immediately impact wildlife in your own region. Larger contributions, as well as contributions sustained over time, will have the most impact, allowing us to plan into the future and create long-term change.

You will be part of a program that is making tangible change and helping species in decline. You will receive updates and, with your permission, we will publicly highlight your generous contributions.

Please help us ensure these animals remain in Ontario, to support a healthy ecosystem and ensure the next generation of people will be able to appreciate the natural diversity that our province has to offer.

## Donations can be made two ways:

1. Online at [www.thamesriverdonations.ca/species-at-risk](http://www.thamesriverdonations.ca/species-at-risk)  
We'll email you a tax-deductible receipt.
2. Cheque made payable to Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (Species At Risk program) and mailed to:

**UTRCA**  
1424 Clarke Road,  
London, Ontario, Canada  
N5V 5B9

Please enclose a note to indicate your donation is for the Reptiles At Risk Program and provide your name and mailing address so we can send you a tax-deductible receipt.



*Midland Painted Turtle*



For more information about SOARR or to discuss your donation, please contact Scott Gillingwater, Species At Risk Biologist  
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