

Montreal

Come out of your shell and help turtles cross the road for nesting season

Conservationists are calling on drivers to be cautious as turtles travel to lay their eggs

[Holly Mueller](#), [Émilie Warren](#) · CBC News ·

Posted: Jun 07, 2022 4:00 AM ET | Last Updated: June 7



Biologist Mélanie Roy holds a juvenile painted turtle, the most common turtle in the Eastern Townships. (Holly Mueller/CBC)

[comments](#)



Knowlton, Que., resident Jessica Brown was driving into nearby Sutton about a

week ago when she noticed what looked like "a big pile of dirt on the road."

Brown said she slowed down because she knew it was turtle season in Quebec's Eastern Townships. And sure enough, as she got closer, she saw a giant snapping turtle about 30 centimetres long.

"I was afraid he was going to get squished," she said.

Brown decided to pull over to the side of the road and got out of her car to try to encourage the reptile to move to the shoulder, but the turtle would not budge.

She said she was too afraid to touch it herself, but eventually, a passerby came along, picked it up and managed to move it onto the grass.

With nesting season in full swing, turtles are starting to come out to lay their eggs and are at risk of getting hit by cars when they cross the road.

WATCH / Learn how to safely move a turtle with the 'hamburger method':



How did the turtle cross the road?

8 days ago | 0:50

Biologist Mélanie Roy demonstrates the "hamburger method" for safely getting our reptilian friends past

traffic.

Importance of taking action

"It's the main time of the year where we're most likely to see turtles, because they are moving a lot," explained Mélanie Roy, a biologist at a non-profit conservation organization called Appalachian Corridor that operates in southeastern Quebec.

"Females in particular, they look for good sites to lay their eggs."

In the span of just a couple of days, Roy has spotted five dead turtles that were hit by cars. One of them was carrying eggs.

"It's a subject that breaks my heart," she said.



Mélanie Roy is a biologist with Appalachian Corridor, a non-profit conservation organization in southeastern Quebec. (Holly Mueller/CBC)

Roy said citizens should report any turtle sightings to the website carapace.ca and take a picture of the animal. to help biologists identify the problematic areas for

the turtles.

She said people should stop and help the animals if it's safe to do so.

"You can [act] like a traffic controller and signal the presence of the turtle to [the other drivers]."

- **Turtle crossing in Eastern Townships successful in saving critters**

If the danger of crossing is imminent, Roy said people can pick up the animal and move it. But they should do so with gloves, only touch the back of the shell, and most importantly, always cross in the direction that the animal was attempting.

A threatened species

The Eastern Townships is home to three turtle species: the snapping turtle, which is the largest, the painted turtle, and the wood turtle, according to Roy. The first two are at risk of becoming endangered, while the last one is considered a vulnerable species in Quebec, Roy explained.

Biologist Francisco Ratamal Diaz, who works at the Nature Conservancy of Canada in Gatineau, Que., said it's most common to see them on roads near wetlands.

One thing that puts turtles particularly at risk is that they take a long time to reach sexual maturity and then reproduce, according to Ratamal Diaz.

That means they have to survive for at least 10 to 15 years before they can start reproducing, depending on the species.

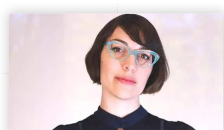
And because females are usually the ones crossing the roads to lay their eggs, more of them are killed compared to males, creating an unequal ratio among the surviving population, he said.

- [Endangered spiny softshell turtle gets protected habitat in Quebec's Eastern Townships](#)

To make matters worse, Ratamal Diaz said about 98 per cent of turtle eggs are eaten by raccoons, skunks and foxes.

That makes protecting female turtles crossing the road even more crucial, he said.

Mowing lawns, water pollution, climate change and invasive species are all other threats to the survival of Quebec's native turtles, Roy said.



Quebec AM 12:41

Why did the turtle cross the road?

It is turtle season in the Eastern Townships. And many are being found trying to cross busy roads. Cars are the second biggest threat to the survival of the turtle species. Guest host Peter Tardif speaks with Holly Mueller in the Townships about what to do when you find a turtle in need.

[CBC's Journalistic Standards and Practices](#) | [About CBC News](#)

[Report Typo or Error](#) | [Corrections and Clarifications](#)

Popular Now in News

1 **CBC EXPLAINS**

Rare 'triple-dip' La Niña could mean a wild winter ahead for Western Canada

942 reading now

2 **ASK CBC NEWS**

Travelling this summer? Here's what you need to know as vaccine mandates lift

797 reading now

3 **CBC INVESTIGATES**

This Ontario restaurant chain owes over \$35K in unpaid wages. Workers, vendors now ask: What can be done?