

Volunteer Nest Sitter Protocol (Outside The Land Between)

Your Role

Throughout turtle nesting season (May to July, depending on your area in Ontario), when you are available you will 'nest-sit' turtles as they are laying their nests on the side of the road. This is to make sure the turtles are not disturbed while laying and that the eggs are not eaten by a predator before you can potentially protect the nest with a cage (you will only do this *if approved by The Land Between staff*, see last three sections of this protocol). You will not be responsible for locating the turtles or nests; instead, Turtle Road Research teams and call in's to The Land Between will locate the nesting turtles, and you will be notified and asked to go nest-sit.

Time Commitment

In May, June and July you may receive texts/calls/emails (you can choose how you would like to be contacted) asking if you are available to nest-sit a turtle that is nesting near you. Most of these calls will be in the evening, although some Snappers nest in the morning and throughout the day so there may be some morning and afternoon calls as well (although you can let us know if you only want to be called in the evening). When you are called out to a site, you should be prepared to nest-sit for up to 4 hours, although more than likely you will not be out that long.

Note: Since you are located outside of The Land Between (our work area), there may not be many call-in's for nesting turtles. Nest Sitter calls in your area depend on how many volunteers we have monitoring the roads there. If you are interested in volunteering on a more regular basis, you can also sign up to be a Road Researcher [here](#).

What You Should Bring With You

- High visibility jacket or bright reflective clothing
- Warm clothing / a blanket for night if it cools down
- Bug spray/ a bug jacket
- A chair to sit in
- A flashlight or headlamp
- Reflective sign or pylon
- Nest protector cage (*only install if you've received special permission, see last three sections of this protocol*)

- Snacks, water, and a book or something else to keep you entertained
- A charged cell phone for safety and in-case you need to contact The Land Between staff for any questions you may have

Nest-sitting Guidelines

Finding the turtle:

- A. If the nesting turtle was called in by a Road Research Team, they will either still be there when you arrive, or they will have left a reflective sign or pylon to mark the turtle so she is easy for you to find.
- B. If the nesting turtle was called in by someone driving by, the turtle might be trickier to find. We will do our best to get the most accurate description of the location as possible. Once you get there, look for a turtle laying on the ground with a dug up pile of soil/sand behind her.

Setting up:

- A. Nesting turtles are very shy and skittish, so you don't want to get too close, shine any bright lights on her (although red lights are ok!), or make too much noise near her.
- B. If there is not already a sign or pylon 10 m in front of the turtle facing oncoming traffic (ie. put there by a Road Researcher who found her), set one up to warn oncoming drivers of the nesting turtle. If you need to walk past her to set up the sign, please safely cross the road to give her a wide berth while walking by her.
- C. Set up your chair/station at least 10 m (2 car lengths) from the nesting turtle. Get comfy and grab a book or something to do, because you might be there for a while.

Watching over the turtle:

- A. When there is still daylight simply look over to check on the turtle every few minutes, or if you hear her start to move.
- B. At night shine your light in front of the turtle (not directly on her) every five minutes.

When turtle is done nesting:

- A. Immediately mark the location of the nest by placing a non-heavy object (e.g. a hat, glove, small book) on top of it once the turtle has moved off the nest. **This is very important because it will help you keep track of where the nest is if it is determined that you need to install a nest protector cage (determined in step C below).** Please do not use anything heavy or use anything that would go through the soil like a stick/stake because this could poke through the nest and harm the eggs.
- B. If the turtle starts to cross the road, check that it is safe for you to walk onto the road and then go ahead and pick her up and carry her the rest of the way across the road in the direction she was heading (please see sections below for how to properly hold and move turtles off the road).
- C. Call The Land Between (705-854-2888) to tell them that the turtle has finished nesting and receive further direction on how you should proceed (i.e. if you should cage the nest or not). **It is important that you do not proceed to cage a nest until you call The Land Between to receive permission to do so.** *If you receive permission to cage the nest, refer to the last three sections of this protocol for help in doing so.*

Helping Turtles Off the Road

Painted Turtles, Blanding's Turtles, Map Turtles

To help a turtle across the road (excluding Snapping Turtles and Musk Turtles) pick up the turtle like you would a hamburger. Place your thumbs on top of the upper shell (carapace) and your fingers underneath their belly shell (plastron). Your hands should be between the front and back legs of the turtle on either side and your palms should be against the shell to ensure a secure grip.



Hold the turtle firmly and tightly, this will not hurt them and will prevent you from dropping them when they squirm while being handled. Also, angle the turtle's belly away from you because when they are scared they might pee. When it is safe, carry the turtle across the road in the direction they were originally travelling/facing. If facing up the middle of the road, make a best guess and move the turtle to that side of the road.

Snapping Turtles

There are multiple ways to safely help a Snapping Turtle across the road. The main rule is to give their front end a wide berth. Here are the approaches we recommend:

- A. The first method is to approach the turtle from behind and grab onto their top shell at the back between their back legs and tail. You can stick your fingers into the squishy leg holes - it won't hurt the turtle. Then, when you have a firm grip, carry the turtle across the road in the direction they were travelling/facing. Note that this method is not ideal for large, heavy snapping turtles.



- B. A second method is to use a car mat to drag the Snapping Turtle across the road. Put a car mat behind the Snapping Turtle and use the same grip from option A to drag them onto the car mat. Then grab the car mat and use it to pull them across the road.
- C. If options A and B do not work, you can also pull them across the road using the same grip, and lifting their back legs off the ground keeping their front legs on the ground.
- D. If you can find a big stick, or have something in your vehicle that they can bite (eg. snowbrush), you can pull them across the road if they bite and hold onto the object.
- E. Lastly there is the "wheelbarrow" method. Using the same grip as A, pick up the back end of the turtle holding them between back legs and tail. Keep their front feet on

ground, and walk forward with them. Sometimes they may snap at you, but that helps them hop forward!

***NEVER PICK UP A TURTLE BY THE TAIL. This goes for all species as their tails are part of their spines - picking up a turtle by the tail could seriously injure them.

Musk turtles (Stinkpots)

*Note: You will likely not find an Eastern Musk Turtle in the Sudbury region.

Eastern Musk turtles will act defensive when handled and try to bite you. Although they are small, their bite can still hurt! To avoid being bitten, hold Musk Turtles from the rear with both thumbs on top of their shell and your fingers on their belly shell between their back legs. Because they do not like to be handled, Musk Turtles will try to wiggle out of your grasp so make sure to hold them tightly, this will keep them safe and will not hurt them. As with the other turtles, take the Musk Turtle across the road in the direction they were facing or travelling when you found them on the road.



What Does a Snapping Turtle Nest Look Like?

Snapping Turtles are the only species that lay nests that can be identified after the fact. Their nests have two large mounds of dirt/sand beside each other that are separated by a line in the dirt made by their large tail, hence the nickname "sand boobs". Refer to the pictures on the next page.



Close up of Snapping turtle nest ("sand boobs")



Snapping turtle nest ("sand boobs") along side of the road. Car keys and key chain are on the left of the nest to show scale.

Is the Nest in a Safe Spot to Cage?

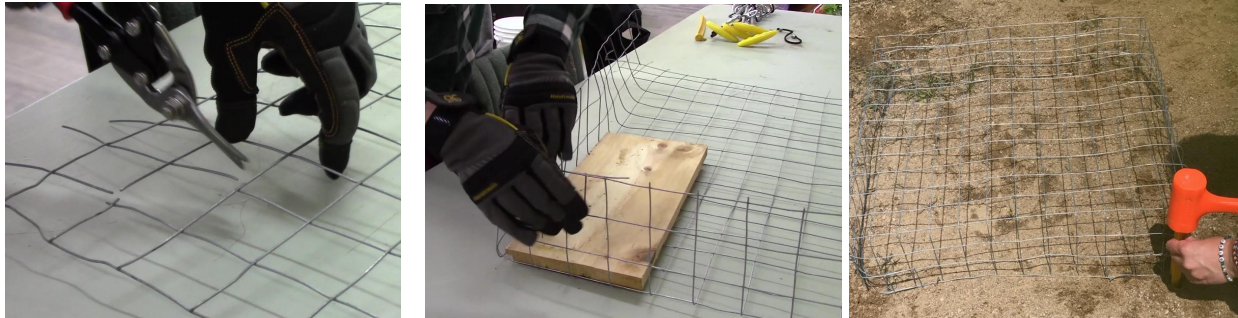
If the nest is on the side of the road or on the shoulder where a car could pull over or drive on, it is not in a safe place to put a cage. If it is in a ditch, or outside a guard rail where it is clear vehicles will not be driving, then it is safe to put a cage here. Keep in mind that if the nest is on someone's property we need to ask permission before caging the nest. If in doubt, ask the Land Between (705-854-2888) for assistance in determining if the nest is safe to cage when you call them.*

***DO NOT PROCEED TO CAGE A NEST UNTIL YOU CALL THE LAND BETWEEN (705-854-2888) TO RECEIVE PERMISSION.** Since you are located outside The Land Between region, we will need to determine if you or another volunteer can conduct regular monitoring of the nest cage once it has been installed. We also need to notify the appropriate partner agencies, including Municipal Road Departments, of the nest cage. *If* you have received permission from us, please use the sections below to help you install the cage.

How to Assemble a Nest Cage (refer to video in webinar)

Obtain chicken wire that has the grid size 2 inches by 2 inches. Using Tin snips or wire cutters, cut a large square of the chicken wire that measures at least 3 feet by 3 feet, you might want to wear gloves to protect your hands from getting scratched on cut wire. Now cut 6 inches into each corner of the square on a diagonal, opening up 3 of the little grid boxes at each corner (see left photo below). Place an object with straight edges like a piece of wood at a corner (where your cut ends) and fold up the two sides around it (see middle

photo below). Now you can either use zip ties to attach the two sides together, or simply bend the wire in multiple places of the overlapping regions to secure the corner tightly. Do this for each corner.



How to Install a Nest Cage

Place the pre-assembled nest cage over top of the nest, using the marker object you placed on the nest as the centre of where the nest cage should go. Make sure to remove the nest marker object before securing the cage. To secure the cage use tent pegs to secure the corners tightly to the ground so predators can not get underneath (see right photo above).

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER: The data you are collecting relates to Species at Risk, and therefore should not be shared with any third party (including any social media posts) without expressed permission from the Charity. This information is highly sensitive and needs to remain private to ensure the safety of these vulnerable species from the pet trade, poaching and deliberate persecution. Even the location of nest protector cages is highly sensitive and should not be shared with any third party - there have been many instances of “nest-robbing” where nests that have been protected with cages are dug up to obtain the hatchlings. By signing up to become a volunteer with The Land Between, you agree to help protect Ontario turtle species by keeping all turtle sighting data and nest location information private.