

The Carolinian Region of southern Ontario is home to 23 native reptile species, including 7 turtles, 15 snakes, and one lizard. Unfortunately, these reptiles are under pressure from centuries of settlement, agriculture, development and urbanization. Creating safe habitat away from these threats is one way we can help conserve reptile populations.



Pond Enhancement

Ponds, both natural and artificial, provide important habitat for many turtle species. However, not all ponds are created equal and there are some simple things that can be done to increase the attractiveness of a pond to turtles.



- **Add Sunning Locations** – Turtles are cold-blooded (poikilothermic) and need to increase their body temperature by basking in the sun. Adding floating logs or boards provides excellent sites for turtles to sun themselves on warm days and increases the chance of observing them. By anchoring logs away from shore, turtles will have more protection from predators.

- **Grade the Banks** – Some former irrigation ponds have steep -sided banks. Grading these banks can help make it easier for turtles to enter and exit the pond. It also creates a larger shallow zone that young turtles like to inhabit.

- **Plant Native Vegetation** – Young turtles frequent the shallow, heavily vegetated edges of a pond. Plant these areas with native plants and avoid mowing the vegetation around the pond. Keep it natural! This will provide the cover that young turtles need to hide from predators such as raccoons. For irrigation ponds, allowing some or all pond edges to become naturalized is very helpful.



- **Create a Nesting Area** – A sand or gravel area free from dense vegetation is an ideal place for turtles to lay their eggs.



Creating a Turtle Nesting Site

Turtles like to lay their eggs in sand or gravel that is free from vegetation and other obstructions. Sometimes they travel great distances in search of a suitable location and this can bring them into contact with predators, roads, and other deadly obstacles. Similarly, the hatchlings have to deal with the same threats when they make the trip back to the safety of the water. These hazards can be reduced by strategically creating safe nesting sites for turtles in suitable locations.



1. **Site Selection** – Select south-facing sites near wetlands or water bodies with well-drained soils and an open canopy. Avoid siting nest structures along linear features, such as roads, paths and pond edges since predators often hunt along these routes.

2. **Create a Base Layer**– Create a base layer or mound with a minimum depth of 30cm of sand. The area should have a diameter of 4 to 6 metres although size can be variable.



3. **Weed Barrier** – Install a barrier to weed growth, such as landscaping fabric or other suitable material, on top of the base layer.

4. **Add Nesting Substrate** – Add sand or a sand/gravel mixture to a depth of at least 30 or 40cm. A large mound will provide multiple angles and microclimates for nesting. Clay, fine sediments and large gravel should not be used.

5. **Monitor and Maintain** – Check for compaction of the substrate and remove invasive vegetation. Some turtle species choose areas with no plants while others prefer a little vegetation so provide options. Monitor site for signs of use by turtles and to watch for evidence of predation.



Long Point Basin Land Trust protects important natural habitats in the central Carolinian Region in southern Ontario. It promotes conservation through outreach, research, habitat restoration, and species at risk recovery projects. For more information about this charitable conservation organization, please visit our website or sign up for our newsletter (print or e-news). Please report reptile sightings from the Long Point Basin to: longpointlandtrust.ca

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