



TURTLES AT TOMMY THOMPSON PARK

BACKGROUND

Turtles play an important role in wetlands, but **populations are declining across North America**. To counteract habitat loss due to urbanization, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority invests in wetland restoration and creation.

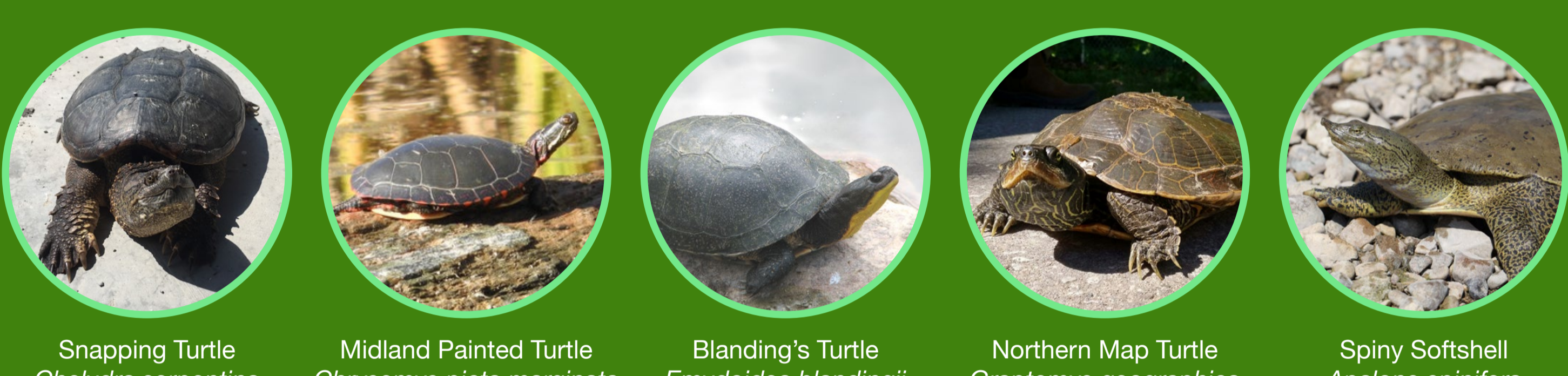
METHODS

We conducted a **turtle mark-recapture study** in the 250 ha artificially created wetland complex at Tommy Thompson Park.



THE TURTLES

We found **four native species of freshwater turtles in Tommy Thompson Park**: Snapping, Painted, Blanding's and Map. We also found two non-native species: Red-eared Sliders and Softshell*.



Snapping Turtle *Chelydra serpentina* Midland Painted Turtle *Chrysemys picta marginata* Blanding's Turtle *Emydoidea blandingii* Northern Map Turtle *Graptemys geographica* Spiny Softshell *Apalone spinifera*

Non-native turtles are bad for our ecosystems. Aquatic pets (such as turtles) should not be released in nature.

*Our native Softshell species is extirpated.

RESULTS

POPULATION

We estimate a **resident population of 140 Painted Turtles, 35 Snapping Turtles and 3 Blanding's Turtles** at TTP. Map and Softshell are not believed to be residents, but occasional visitors to the wetlands.

SEX RATIO

We found an **even male:female sex ratio for both Painted and Snapping Turtles** at TTP, though this ratio varies between the individual wetlands. Only female Blanding's Turtles were found.



MOVEMENTS

We were able to track weekly movements of Blanding's and Snapping Turtles at TTP.

Snapping Turtles: females are more likely than males to explore other wetlands within the park during a season, travelling a minimum distance of 0.76 km, and most returned to their original wetland to overwinter.

All **Blanding's Turtles** were quite active, exploring at least three wetlands within the park, travelling a minimum distance of 3 km.

PROJECT SUMMARY

The results from this study on turtles at Tommy Thompson Park demonstrate **the importance of connected habitats** within a wilderness area. The various wetlands we often perceive as separate actually provide habitat as a whole.

As well, the very low vehicle traffic in the park provides a **safe haven for turtle movement and nesting**, with reduced risk of road mortality and an equal sex ratio.

The turtle population is healthy and we expect that more turtles will continue to colonize and establish themselves in the park.

