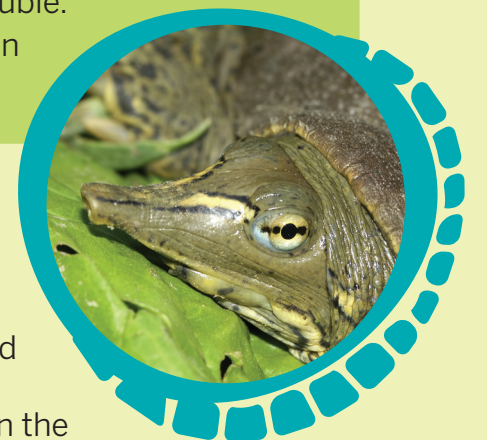# Canada's Freshwater TURTLES

Don't let their name fool you! Although freshwater turtles need our lakes, rivers and wetlands to survive, they also rely on land for parts of their life. For some species, the woods and fields are the place to be during the summer months, while others rarely venture out of the water. But even for the aquatic ones, land is needed to lay eggs in the spring. Whether they live mostly in the water, on dry land, or anywhere in between, all freshwater turtles mate and hibernate in water. The fact that they need a combination of aquatic and terrestrial habitats to survive makes them pretty cool, but also hard to conserve. Sadly, each of our eight species of Canadian freshwater turtles are at-risk, or has a population that is in trouble. But learning more about them is a great first step in helping them out!

Fun Facts

- Turtles have been on Earth for over 200 million years, surviving major events like the extinction of the dinosaurs, numerous ice ages and other catastrophes.
- Turtles have a shell made of bones covered in keratin (like your fingernails!) that protects both their backs (the carapace) and their fronts (the plastron).
- Canada's freshwater turtles can live for a very long time, as many as 70 years!
- Some species can get some oxygen from the water directly through their skin.
- Freshwater turtles occur in every Canadian province except Newfoundland and Labrador, and there are no turtles in the three territories.
- They can eat a variety of things, including berries, water plants, bugs and fish.
- Turtles don't have teeth, but they can catch and tear their prey using their strong beaks and claws.

Which turtle is which???

Our freshwater turtles come in a variety of shapes, colours and sizes! Try to match each picture showing a Canadian native species with its description and name!

A. Wood Turtle

B. Common Snapping Turtle

C. Spiny Softshell

D. Eastern Musk Turtle

E. Painted Turtle

F. Map Turtle

G. Spotted Turtle

H. Blanding's Turtle

1. I'm a dark green turtle with a high, round shell and two white stripes on each side of my face. Because I make a foul-smelling liquid to protect myself, my other name is Stinkpot!

2. Like my name says, I am black with lots of bright yellow spots. Even if I mostly live in the water, I spend some time wandering on land in the spring.

3. I look prehistoric, with my large body, and long neck and spiked tail! Unlike other freshwater turtles, I can't totally withdraw into my shell.

4. I have a dark face but bright orange or yellow legs. I spend the most time on land than all Canadian turtles, spending the whole summer in the woods.

5. I have coloured red and yellow stripes on my neck, face and legs, and red spots around the edge of my dark carapace. I'm the only turtle found from coast to coast in Canada.

6. My flat, soft shell is olive coloured with black spots and makes me easy to recognize. I like to bury myself in mud while using my long nose like a snorkel!

7. You can recognize me by my bright yellow chin and throat and my "smile"! I'm one of the two freshwater turtle species that can eat on land.

8. I have pretty yellow or light brown patterns all over my body and shell. I like to bask in the sun on rocks and logs. But if I'm startled, I'll quickly plunge in the water!

(ANSWER: A4, B3, C6, D1, E5, F8, G2, H7)

Things you can do
to help Canada's freshwater turtles:

- Tell your parents and other adults to keep an eye out for turtle crossing signs and when they see one, to be careful of turtles on the road.
- Learn how to handle turtles, so that you are ready to help one out if you see it crossing a road. If you need to move a turtle, move it safely to the side of the road in the direction it was already heading.
- Participate in a shoreline clean-up to help turtle habitat.
- See if there are turtle research projects in your area that need volunteers. If there are, participate!
- If you see a turtle that seems safe, observe it from afar, as disturbing it could cause it stress.

Learn more at **HWW.ca** and **CanadianWildlifeFederation.ca**

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