

Turtle-watching along the Seine River



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The Seine River is an urban refuge for both species of Manitoba turtles. The more familiar species is the western painted turtle (*Chrysemys picta*). These small turtles are often seen basking on logs at the edge of the river. The painted turtle gets its name from the bright yellow and red markings on its neck, head, and underside.

The common snapping turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*) is much more elusive. Snapping turtles rarely leave the water even to bask. They just float at the surface where they can easily be mistaken for driftwood by passing canoeists.

Adult snapping turtles (20 to 50 cm) are roughly three-and-a-half times larger than painted turtles (11 to 14 cm). The spikes running down a snapper's tail are reminders that these reptiles have lived on Earth

for 90 million years — since the age of the dinosaurs!

Most sightings of snapping turtles occur in June or July, when mature females (15 to 20 years old) leave the water to lay eggs. These algae-covered creatures lumber out of the river to find a patch of well-drained sand or gravel. They often dig nests in the gravel shoulders beside busy roads or trails. This puts them at risk of being hit by cars or being returned to the river, by well-meaning people, before they lay their eggs.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada provides tips for “Helping turtles cross the road” (YouTube). Small turtles can be carried “like a hamburger” across the road. Large snapping turtles can be lifted at the back of the shell and “wheel-barrowed” to safety. I would not try this without thick gloves. Although toothless, snapping turtles have horny beaks that can break small bones.

Every year, SOS receives stories and pictures of happy encounters with turtles along the Seine River. This year, a disturbing number of dead turtles were found. One much-loved snapping turtle lived near Nova Vista. Walkers in this area observed a canoeist hitting a snapping turtle with a paddle



Supplied photo

Look for bright yellow and red stripes on the neck, head and underside of painted turtles.

to get it to release a goose, which may have contributed to the death of Pedro who admirers described as a “beautiful, 50-pound, four-foot-, six-inch creature who has probably lived in that stretch of the Seine happily and unmolested since the last Trudeau government.”

To share your turtle sightings with other turtle-lovers, visit the Manitoba Herps Atlas

(<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/manitoba-herps-atlas>).

You should also download the Go Wild Manitoba app for iPad or iPhone.

Michele Kading is a community correspondent for St. Vital and the executive director of Save Our Seine.