

How To Safely Move a Turtle Across the Road

by The Canadian Wildlife Federation

Most of the species of freshwater turtles that live in Canada live in lakes or wetlands — like marshes and swamps. If the turtles remained in those areas they would be relatively safe. Unfortunately, turtles frequently leave this relative safety to lay eggs or move between wetlands.

Road mortality is an important threat to most freshwater turtles. Turtles move across roads at the speed of, well, turtles. Even if a turtle perceives a car approaching it, there is little chance that it is capable of getting off the road quickly enough to avoid being hit.

Here's where you can come to their rescue! *You* can save a turtle from being hit by a car by helping it across the road. Here are some tips on moving turtles.

Step 1: Safety!

First of all, make sure it is **safe to help the turtle**. Look both ways before heading out onto the road. If there are cars coming, don't risk your life.

Step 2: Get a Good Handle on the Situation (and the turtle!)

It is fairly easy to pick up a turtle — unless you're dealing with a Snapping Turtle (more on that later). Use both hands and grab the turtle on both sides of the shell. The turtle may not appreciate or understand that they are being rescued from the road. It may scratch or pee on you, so be prepared for this. If you have a firm grip on the turtle with two hands you are less likely to drop it if it does scratch you.

Step 3: Make Sure to Move in the Right (or Left) Direction

Always move the turtle in the direction that it is going. It knows where it wants to go. Release the turtle on the gravel shoulder of the road and it will likely quickly shuffle away from you and the road.

Take a bow, as you just saved a turtle!

Snapping Turtles are Special

Moving Snapping Turtles — especially large ones — is more challenging. Snapping Turtles can be fast and they can bite. They can also spin around quickly or even lunge.

Do not grab the sides of the shell of a Snapping Turtle as the head may whip around and bite you.

One option to move a Snapping Turtle is the wheelbarrow method – grab the back of the shell near the back legs, lift the rear end of the turtle, and walk it forward. The turtle will either walk forward on its front legs or it can be slid forward. The paved road will not harm the tough skin of the turtle.

Another option is to get the turtle to bite a long stick and drag the turtle off the road. If you happen to have a shovel, used it to lift and move a Snapping Turtle off the road. Don't lift the shovel too far above the road as the turtle may try to move and fall off the shovel.

Learn more about how you can help at HelptheTurtles.ca