



COSEWIC
Committee on the Status of
Endangered Wildlife in Canada

COSEWIC
Comité sur la situation des
espèces en péril au Canada

Canadian Turtles in Trouble

WINDSOR, ONTARIO (May 2, 2018). The Midland Painted Turtle, a familiar sight along Ontario lakeshores and ponds, is now in trouble. The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) added this turtle to a growing list of species found to be at risk in the region between Toronto and Windsor, Canada's most species-rich biodiversity hotspot.

Painted Turtles take about 10 years to mature, and lay small numbers of eggs. This means that even small increases in adult deaths can lead to large declines in population size. Although the Painted Turtle still thrives in some regions of Canada, the increasing numbers of turtles killed by vehicles and the historical loss of 70% of southern Ontario wetland habitat led COSEWIC to conclude that the species is of Special Concern. Every one of Canada's ten native freshwater turtle species is now at risk in at least some part of the country.



Midland Painted Turtle © Joe Crowley

The Gray Ratsnake, another southwestern Ontario species, was confirmed to be Endangered. This harmless snake is Canada's largest, reaching lengths up to two metres in length. It overwinters in a shrinking number of small islands of natural woodland, surrounded by a sea of less-friendly habitat crisscrossed by dangerous roads.

Over a quarter of Canada's at-risk species – 217 in total – live, or lived, in the heavily altered landscape of southwestern Ontario. Thirty-three have not been seen for decades.

At the Windsor meeting, COSEWIC members witnessed first hand many threats to species, but also saw promising ways to address the problems. Covered in restored tallgrass prairie, Ontario's largest eco-passage allows threatened species to move



Gray Ratsnake © Danna Leaman

safely over the new Windsor-Essex Parkway. "We need to continue to protect the few natural places we have left, and we must also be proactive and creative in how we reconnect them one to another," said Karen Cedar, Ojibway Prairie Complex Naturalist. Dr. Trevor Pitcher, Director of the Freshwater Restoration Ecology Centre at the University of Windsor, highlighted habitat restoration of the Detroit River for local Lake Sturgeon, a threatened species assessed by COSEWIC in

2017: "We put down ten tons of gravel and the sturgeon immediately started

laying eggs - they had been waiting almost a century."

COSEWIC assessed a total of 44 wildlife species from across Canada at the April 2018 Species Assessment Meeting. Other examples (with assessment status) include:

- Coastal Vesper Sparrow, last seen nesting near Nanaimo in 2014 (Endangered)
- Common Nighthawk and Olive-sided Flycatcher, two birds whose numbers seem to be stabilizing after precipitous drops in recent decades (both moved from Threatened to Special Concern)
- Whitefish species that have coevolved together, and are so interdependent that a decline in one can lead to the loss of both from their Yukon and Ontario lakes (Threatened/Extinct)
- Smoker's Lung Lichen, a grey-green component of BC's humid, old-growth forests (Threatened)
- Banff Springs Snail, a Canadian endemic, still in hot water in some of the thermal springs of Banff (Endangered)

Further details on all wildlife species assessed at this meeting can be found on the COSEWIC website (<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/committee-status-endangered-wildlife.html>).

Next meeting

COSEWIC's next scheduled wildlife species assessment meeting will be held in November 2018.

About COSEWIC

COSEWIC assesses the status of wild species, subspecies, varieties, or other important units of biological diversity, considered to be at risk in Canada. To do so, COSEWIC uses scientific, Aboriginal traditional and community knowledge provided by experts from governments, academia and other organizations. Summaries of assessments are

currently available to the public on the COSEWIC website (<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/committee-status-endangered-wildlife/assessments.html>) and will be submitted to the Federal Minister of the Environment and Climate Change in fall 2018 for listing consideration under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). At that time, the status reports and status appraisal summaries will be publicly available on the Species at Risk Public Registry (<http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/>).

At its most recent meeting, COSEWIC assessed 44 wildlife species in various COSEWIC risk categories, including 16 Endangered, 13 Threatened, and 12 Special Concern. In addition to these wildlife species that are in COSEWIC risk categories, COSEWIC assessed 2 as Extinct and 1 as Data Deficient.

COSEWIC comprises members from each provincial and territorial government wildlife agency, four federal entities (Canadian Wildlife Service, Parks Canada Agency, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and the Canadian Museum of Nature), three Non-government Science Members, and the Co-chairs of the Species Specialist and the Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Subcommittees.

Definition of COSEWIC terms and status categories:

Wildlife Species: A species, subspecies, variety, or geographically or genetically distinct population of animal, plant or other organism, other than a bacterium or virus, that is wild by nature and is either native to Canada or has extended its range into Canada without human intervention and has been present in Canada for at least 50 years.

Extinct (X): A wildlife species that no longer exists.

Extirpated (XT): A wildlife species that no longer exists in the wild in Canada, but exists elsewhere.

Endangered (E): A wildlife species facing imminent extirpation or extinction.

Threatened (T): A wildlife species that is likely to become Endangered if nothing is done to reverse the factors leading to its extirpation or extinction.

Special Concern (SC): A wildlife species that may become Threatened or Endangered because of a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats.

Not at Risk (NAR): A wildlife species that has been evaluated and found to be not at risk of extinction given the current circumstances.

Data Deficient (DD): A category that applies when the available information is insufficient (a) to resolve a wildlife species' eligibility for assessment or (b) to permit an assessment of the wildlife species' risk of extinction.

Species at Risk: A wildlife species that has been assessed as Extirpated, Endangered, Threatened or Special Concern.

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For inquiries on amphibians and reptiles (Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander, Spring Salamander (Carolinian population), Eastern Painted Turtle, Gray Ratsnake, Midland Painted Turtle):

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For inquiries on birds (Chimney Swift, Common Nighthawk, Streaked Horned Lark, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Coastal Vesper Sparrow):

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For inquiries on freshwater fishes (Carminé Shiner, Lake Whitefish, European Whitefish):

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<p>For inquiries on lichens (Smoker's Lung Lichen):</p> <p>Dr. David H. S. Richardson Saint Mary's University Telephone: 902-496-8174 david.richardson@smu.ca</p>	<p>For inquiries on marine fishes (Basking Shark (Pacific population)):</p> <p>Dr. John D. Neilson Telephone: 250 465-1728 largepelagicsscscientist@gmail.com</p>
<p>For inquiries on molluscs (Banff Springs Snail, Hotwater Physa, Striped Whitelip):</p> <p>Dr. Dwayne Lepitzki Telephone: 403-762-0864 lepitzki@telusplanet.net</p>	<p>For inquiries on mosses (Acuteleaf Small Limestone Moss):</p> <p>Dr. René Belland University of Alberta Telephone: 780-492-0801 rbelland@ualberta.ca</p>
<p>For inquiries on marine mammals (Harbour Seal Lacs des Loups Marins subspecies):</p> <p>Dr. Hal Whitehead Dalhousie University Telephone: 902-494-3723 Telephone: 902-414-6140 hal.whitehead@dal.ca</p> <p>Dr. David Lee Telephone: 514-754-8524 david.s.lee@mail.mcgill.ca</p>	<p>For inquiries on plants (Athabasca Thrift, Blanket-leaved Willow, Downy Yellow False Foxglove, Fern-leaved Yellow False Foxglove, Floccose Tansy, Large-headed Woolly Yarrow, Mackenzie Hairgrass, Sand-dune Short-capsuled Willow, Smooth Yellow False Foxglove, Tall Bugbane, Tall Woolly-heads, Turnor's Willow):</p> <p>Del Meidinger Meidinger Ecological Consultants Ltd. Telephone: 250-881-1180 Telephone: 778-977-1180 delmeidinger@gmail.com</p>
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