

An Urgent Appeal: Help Give Rare Turtles a Home for the Holidays

November 24, 2016 [Halifax, N.S.] - The Nova Scotia Nature Trust announced today a campaign to ensure that Wink and Atahualpa have a home for the holidays. Wink and Atahualpa are adorable, yet highly endangered Blanding's Turtles, some of a small number still surviving in Nova Scotia. The Nature Trust has an opportunity to save a critical natural sanctuary for Wink and his endangered friends, and is asking the public for help.

The Nature Trust has secured an agreement to purchase a 36 acre property at Barren Meadow in southwest Nova Scotia. They have just over a month to raise the remaining \$20,000 needed to make the rare turtle sanctuary a reality. The closing date for the property is December 19th.



Photo: Brennan Caverhill

Blanding's Turtles are listed on both the Canadian and Nova Scotian endangered species lists. There are only about 350 turtles left in the province. With less than 1% of hatchlings surviving, and much of their habitat increasingly threatened by habitat loss and degradation, it is vital to protect the last remaining refuges.

Barren Meadow provides important turtle habitat. Two branches of Barren Meadow Brook pass through the property then join with Pleasant River. The brook is deeply cut, and holds water throughout even the driest summers, ensuring the turtles can easily forage for food along the side of the brook. Blanding's turtles travel great distances away from streams and rivers in search of basking and nesting sites. Although mostly forested, the property also includes bogs, the "barrens" that gave the area their name and unique geological features with bands of rock outcrops occurring in strips throughout the forest. This unusual topography is even visible from an aerial view of the region.

The Barren Meadow sanctuary will build on a growing network of protected Blanding's Turtle habitat in the area. To date, the Nature Trust has protected seven properties near Barren Meadow, encompassing over 270 acres for these endangered turtles. The Barren Meadow site is also surrounded by the proposed Shingle Lake Nature Reserve (pending designation by the Province), which will protect adjoining turtle habitat.

Researchers with the Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute (MTRI) have spent three summers studying turtles in Barren Meadow, getting to know the turtles so well they are individually named. Atahualpa, for example, was found being carried on top of other turtles like his namesake, the Inca King who was carried by his subjects when he met the Spanish conquistadors.

MTRI's extensive research helps to identify critical areas for protection by the Nature Trust. Jeffie McNeil, a species-at-risk biologist with MTRI, highlighted the importance of the Barren Meadow site. "A high proportion of young turtles have been detected in this area, making it particularly important to conserve," she said.

Nova Scotians have a unique opportunity to make a difference for rare turtles, and to give Atahualpa and Wink a home this holiday season and for many holidays to come.

The Nature Trust must raise \$20,000 by the December 19th closing date. They have issued an appeal for \$10,000 in public support, which will be generously matched by \$10,000 in matching grants from the Nova Scotia Crown Share Land Legacy Trust and the Marguerite Hubbard Charitable Foundation. Together these funds will make it possible to acquire and ensure the sanctuary is protected and stewarded in perpetuity.

The Nature Trust's Executive Director, Bonnie Sutherland, urges Nova Scotians to help save this rare turtle sanctuary. "With so few Blanding's Turtles left in Nova Scotia, their fate is truly in our hands. Saving their remaining habitat is critical to the survival not just of Wink and his friends, but to the survival of this entire species in Nova Scotia."

To make a donation to save the Barren Meadow turtle sanctuary, visit www.nsnt.ca/savingturtles or call (902) 425-LAND.

Sutherland added that people can save turtles and give a meaningful and memorable holiday gift at the same time, by "adopting" a turtle or a family of turtles. The donor receives a charitable tax receipt and the recipient receives a beautiful adoption certificate, turtle note cards, and a letter highlighting the conservation work the adoption makes possible. The gift can even be mailed directly to the recipient, making holiday gift-giving easy.

The Nature Trust's endangered species work, including turtle conservation, receives financial support of the Government of Canada's Habitat Stewardship Program. Thanks to ongoing support from government and other generous community partners and individual supporters, the Nature Trust has already protected over 80 properties, encompassing over 10,000 acres of outstanding conservation lands all across the province. These sites include the McGowan Lake and Bull Moose Meadow conservation lands, other critical turtle sanctuaries that Nova Scotians generously stepped up to help the Nature Trust protect.



Photo: Brennan Caverhill