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imperiled if threats continue. Major threats to the species include, shoreline development, chronic disruption from boat traffic on waterways, boat collisions and propeller strikes, road mortality of nesting females, and habitat fragmentation through damming and lock systems along waterways. Maddie is a turtle on the move and her unexpected story illustrates the importance of keeping our shared waterways protected and connected for the movement of wildlife.

We'll have to wait for the rest of Maddie's story to unfold in turtle time. As in The Tortoise and the Hare fable, we have yet again been humbled by the slow and steady progress of the turtle.

Thanks to Matthew Keevil, Steven Kell, Rachel Fallas, Sarah Lamond, Peter Mills, and Jackie Litzgus—all friends, colleagues, and admirers of Maddie and her journey.



The Algonquin Wildlife Research Station (est. 1944) a registered Canadian charity, is home to among the longest-running ecological studies in the world, including the Algonquin Turtle Project. The AWRS promotes excellence in scientific research and environmental monitoring as well as experiential outdoor education. Learn more and support the latest wildlife science at algonquinwrs.ca.



A close-up of Maddie (2014).
Photo: Patrick Moldowan.



Maddie observed downriver in 2022.
Photo: Sarah Lamond.

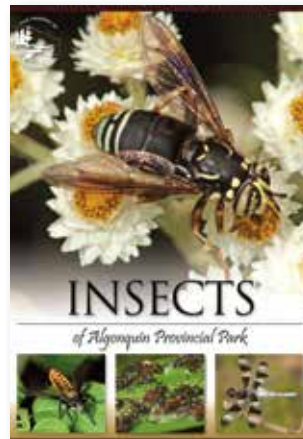
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Photo: Peter Ferguson



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By submitting your observations and photos to iNaturalist.ca, you can help park staff document biodiversity, protect habitat and even help us eradicate invasive species! In addition to records of beautiful sedges and colourful moths, iNaturalist can be a helpful tool for park managers to collect information on newly established invasive species, including aquatic invasive species.

iNaturalist Canada is run by the Canadian Wildlife Federation, the Royal Ontario Museum, and iNaturalist.org at the California Academy of Sciences.



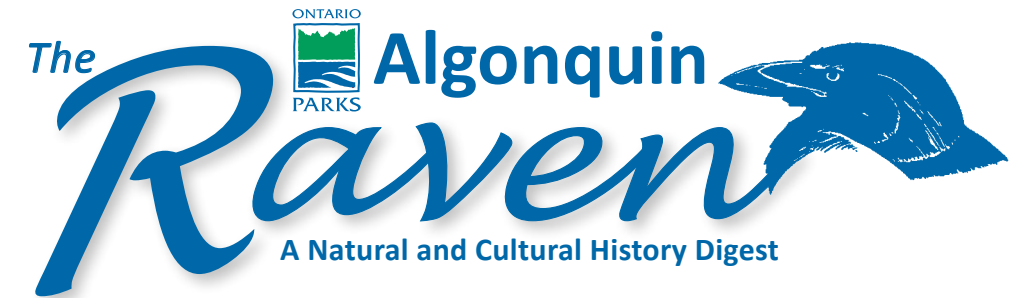
Algonquin Visitor Centre
April 18 to October 26, 2025
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October 27 to December 23, 2025
Weekends 9 - 5 pm, full services
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3K P.R. 10 01 2025 | ISSN 0701-6972 (print) ISSN 1927-8624 (online) © King's Printer for Ontario, 2025



Vol. 65 No. 4 • October 1, 2025

Have a map, will travel: The story of a turtle on the move

by Patrick Moldowan

You know that folktale, the one about The Tortoise and the Hare? Just in case, here's a short refresh. In a faraway woodland, a boastful Hare brags to the other wildlife about how fast he can run. The Hare challenges other creatures to a race and when none of them accept, the Hare resorts to taunting. The humble Tortoise, weary of the Hare's arrogance, rises to the challenge. The Hare leaves the Tortoise in the dust right off the starting line. With a generous lead, assumed to guarantee a victory, the Hare soon decides to take a nap. The Hare wakes later to find that the plodding tortoise, ever

slow and steady, has crossed the finish line. A storybook lesson learned: The perseverance of the Tortoise defeated the overconfidence of the Hare. This fable of a persistent turtle on the move sets the stage for our own tale right here in Algonquin Park.

The Northern Map Turtle is a stunning creature to behold. Bold black and yellow lines adorn the face and limbs, and the streamline shell sports an intricate network of lines that resemble a map, for which the species is named. Living in rivers and large lakes in southern Ontario and Quebec, and the northeastern U.S., you will be forgiven

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Maddie of the Madawaska.
Photo: Patrick Moldowan.

Ontario

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for not recognizing the Northern Map Turtle as a resident of Algonquin Park. In fact, you'll find no mention of this species in past publications about the reptiles of the park. And so, you can imagine our surprise ...

In 2012, news of a unique sighting reached biologists at the Algonquin Wildlife Research Station (AWRS): A Northern Map Turtle was sighted sunning itself in the South Madawaska River, south of the Old Airfield. This sighting was remarkable for several reasons, most especially that a map turtle had never been observed in the western uplands of Algonquin Park despite a multitude of astute park visitors, highly skilled park naturalist staff, and a then over 40-year study of the turtles of the park. Where did this turtle come from? What was their story?

Turtles can be creatures of habit and by summer 2014 there was the same turtle, sunning riverside among the same jumble of logs. Turtle biologists at the AWRS hatched a plan to capture the turtle with the purpose of gathering baseline data—the first individual in this area of the province could teach us a lot. Equipped with canoe, nets, wetsuit, snorkel, and flippers, the group headed out and returned triumphant. After much splashing, hollering, and excitement “Maddie of the Madawaska” was in hand (The Raven, Vol. 55, No. 3)! She was measured, underwent a general health assessment, and marked with a shallow notch on the front-left of her shell for future

identification. In addition to her shell marking, Maddie had several distinguishing features, including an extra scute (scale-like covering) on her upper shell, a stub tail, and several missing claws on her left front foot. Within hours she was back to the river and released at her site of capture. Little did we know, Maddie's story was just getting started.

Nearly a decade would pass and there were no sightings of Maddie. Had she experienced a tough winter in the highlands? After all, the chilly Algonquin Dome is one of the highest-elevated areas in southern Ontario and it is apparently the cool local climate that prevents map turtles (among other turtle and reptile species) from living here regularly. Maybe Maddie went searching for the company of other map turtles? Situated around Lake of Two Rivers, she was approximately 100 kilometres from the nearest population of map turtles in any direction. Where was Maddie and would we ever see her again? Such extended absences are not unusual for long-lived wildlife such as turtles. As with most things related to turtles, we would have to be patient.

In 2022, park staff Sarah Lamond and Peter Mills were conducting ecological surveys along the Madawaska River near the town of Madawaska. From their canoe they spotted something on a distant log that was out of the ordinary: A Northern Map Turtle! Knowing that the sighting was unusual and that map turtles are quick

Geographic range of Northern Map Turtle in Ontario (orange shading)



Observations of Maddie in 2012 and 2014 (yellow circle) and 2022 and 2025 (purple circle).

Inset: Maddie's likely journey from near Lake of Two Rivers (yellow circle) and downstream along the Madawaska River. Black lines represent dams and water spillways on her route.

- 2012 & 2014
- 2022 & 2025
- Northern Map Turtle Range
- Algonquin Park Boundary
- Dams



to dive when approached, Sarah snapped a photo from a distance. Also, knowing the scientific value of such sightings, Sarah uploaded the photo to iNaturalist, an online platform for cataloguing, sharing, and discussing nature sightings. A year later and continent away, while working abroad, I happened upon Sarah's photo and had to rub my eyes to be sure of what I was seeing ... that was Maddie, and she was 60 kilometres away from her initial point of capture!

Before long, an Algonquin canoe routes map was spread across my kitchen table to retrace Maddie's probable journey. She lived up to her moniker of “Maddie of the Madawaska” and, even by most direct route, her voyage would make a seasoned backcountry canoe tripper blush. Starting at the South Madawaska River (Airfield), Maddie swam across scenic Lake of Two Rivers to Pog Lake and crossed over a small water control dam onward to Whitefish Lake. From there, to Rock Lake, over another small dam, and into the expansive Galeairy Lake. After Maddie left the Algonquin Park boundary and reached the town of Whitney, she crossed yet another dam and must have felt the increasing pull of the river to continue downstream. She went down the Madawaska River, passing through stretches of thundering whitewater rapids, and settled in a quiet downstream bend in the river. Maddie's travel distance is among the longest reported for a freshwater turtle in the world and the sightings of her fill a gap in the species' geographic range in Ontario.

As for how Maddie found her way to Lake of Two Rivers in the first place, we might never know. From Maddie's 2012/2014 sightings at Lake of Two Rivers, the closest source population in the Madawaska River system is approximately 130 km away by straight distance (170 km by water). It is possible, even probable, that she made this initial long distance journey upstream and set up residence for at least a couple years before deciding to head back downriver. Alternatively, there is a chance that Maddie was brought into the park and released by a well-intentioned park visitor. This is an opportunity to remind readers that long distance relocation of plants and animals is strongly discouraged for the health of wildlife in question, the environment, and to limit risk of disease introduction.

I am happy to report that Maddie's story is not over yet. In May 2025, more than a decade after her first capture and some 60 km distant, Maddie was recaptured near the site of her 2022 sighting. She again received a check-up, including measurement and weigh-in. She appears to be well and has put on substantial growth, including adding 3.5 cm to her shell length (or about the length of an AA battery) and one kilogram in body mass.

The Northern Map Turtle is a species of Special Concern in Ontario and Canada, a status that does not provide habitat protection but recognizes regional population declines and that the species may become further

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