

LOCAL/REGION

Snake, rattle and roll

Massasauga rattlesnakes in Wainfleet Bog subject of study

By WAYNE CREIGHTON

TRIBUNE STAFF

PORT COLBORNE

While most people tend to shy away from rattlesnakes, about 40 people filled the Humberstone Community Centre Wednesday night to learn about the Eastern Massasauga rattlesnake and the Wainfleet Bog.

Participating in the workshop were biologist Arne Yagi from the Ministry of Natural Resources, Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority ecologist Kim Fröhlich and representatives from the Toronto Zoo who brought along Lewis — a live Eastern Massasauga rattler captured seven years ago near Georgian Bay.

Yagi outlined recent efforts by the MNR to study the Eastern Massasauga rattlesnake population the Wainfleet Bog. With the help of several volunteers last summer, the MNR was able to identify five adult Massasauga rattlers and implanted telemetry devices in three of them, which allowed the MNR to monitor the snake's movements and determine hibernation as well as gestation areas in and near the bog.

The Eastern Massasauga rattlesnake is the only remaining venomous snake in Ontario and since 1990 has been considered an endangered species. The largest remaining populations occur in



Lewis, a Eastern Massasauga rattler, is part of an endangered species. STAFF PHOTO

the Bruce Peninsula and Georgian Bay areas. It can also be found in smaller numbers on the Ojibway Prairie in southwestern Ontario and in the Wainfleet bog.

"The study was very successful and helped us determine a lot about the Massasauga rattlesnake and its envi-

ronment in the Wainfleet bog," said Yagi.

In 1997, most of the Wainfleet bog was purchased by the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, the Ontario Ministry of the Natural Resources and the Nature Conservancy of Canada and Fröhlich spoke Tuesday about public lands controlled by the NPCA known as the Wainfleet Bog Conservation Lands.

"The goal for the management of the bog is to provide a healthier, more natural bog site for the rattlesnakes as well as the other creatures living in the bog," said Fröhlich.

"We call it an ecosystem approach and basically what that entails is keeping the water on the site and re-establishing some the bog plants such as the sphagnum moss.

"We will continue to monitor the situation especially how well the rattlesnakes and turtles are doing. The healthier their population is than the healthier the bog is and the more successful we are."

The Ministry of Natural Resources is asking anyone living near the bog who suspects they may have seen a Eastern Massasauga rattlesnake to record the date, time, specific location and habitat and call the Herp Hotline at (905) 562-1178.

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