

TRACKING RATTLESNAKES AT KILLBEAR

At Killbear Provincial Park, near Parry Sound, researchers from Ottawa's Carleton University are using radio-telemetry to track the elusive Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake.

Killbear has one of the few remaining strongholds of this threatened species. The largest remaining populations of Massasauga Rattlesnakes in Ontario are found on the Bruce Peninsula and the eastern shore of Georgian Bay.

Chris Parent, a Masters of Science student, has examined more than 450 adult rattlesnakes since the research project began in 1992. The weight, length and sex of each snake are recorded. To determine individual growth rates and longevity, the snakes are injected with passive integrated transponders or "PIT" tags.

Over 30 of the snakes have also been surgically implanted with tiny radio-transmitters. Each transmitter weighs about as much as two quarters and allows researchers to track the movements of individual snakes. The transmitters have a life-span of up to two years before they are removed or replaced.

By recording their movements, Chris can look for patterns in the snakes' activities and get a snapshot of their habitat needs. Ontario Parks is particularly interested in data about movement, growth rates and behaviours which can be used to develop conservation guidelines for provincial and national parks throughout Ontario.

The Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake is threatened in Ontario, primarily because of loss of habitat and human persecution. They rarely exceed 75 centimetres in length and are Ontario's only venomous snake.



TRACKING RATTLESNAKES
AT KILLBEAR

At Killbear Provincial Park, near Parry Sound, researchers from Ottawa's Carleton University are using radio-telemetry to track the elusive Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake.

Killbear has one of the few remaining strongholds of this threatened species. The largest remaining population of Massasauga Rattlesnakes in Ontario are found on the Bruce Peninsula and the eastern shore of Georgian Bay.

Chris Parent, a Masters of Science student, has examined more than 450 adult rattlesnakes since the research project began in 1992. The weight, length and sex of each snake are recorded. To determine individual growth rates and longevity, the snakes are injected with passive integrated transponders or "PIT" tags.

Over 30 of the snakes have also been surgically implanted with tiny radio-transmitters. Each transmitter weighs about as much as two quarters and allows researchers to track the movements of individual snakes. The transmitters have a life-span of up to two years before they are removed or replaced.

By recording their movements, Chris can look for patterns in the snakes' activities and get a snapshot of their habitat needs. Ontario Parks is particularly interested in data about movement, growth rates and behaviours which can be used to develop conservation guidelines for provincial and national parks throughout Ontario.

The Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake is threatened in Ontario, primarily because of loss of habitat and human persecution. They rarely exceed 75 centimetres in length and are Ontario's only venomous snake.

