



Adopt a snake

Contribute to research of the Massasauga rattlesnake

By Sue Russell

Our Rattlesnake rag is never complete without a rattlesnake article. This month we have some great news - you can adopt your own pet massasauga rattle snake. Kilbear Provincial Park, at Nobel, just north of Parry Sound, is raising funds for more research on the area's threatened species.

In order to follow the antics of each snake they catch an identification chip is embedded under its skin. And a few of them will have a radio transmitter. In this way the researchers can record their mating and hibernation habits, diet and area of hunting and sunbathing.

The purpose of their research is to find out what effect humans have on the rattle snake population. So far they have discovered that the rattler will travel over a greater area, up to one kilometre in a season, where there is very little human activity. In Kilbear Park where there are lots of people a snake won't travel much more than 200 metres.

There is lots more information that can be learned about their habits when surrounded by people which will improve their chances of surviving. Funding for this study has been coming from the Ministry of Natural Resources through Parks Canada but more funds are required

to complete the study.

The paved road that runs through the Park has divided this snake population. Through DNA testing the researchers have learned that the snakes won't cross that road. This main road is preventing the Massasauga from interbreeding and two separate species are developing.

All the other roads are not paved and unfortunately there has been a small amount of road kill - cars have become another predator. However, signs warning motorists of snake crossings have been effective in lowering the number killed by cars.

Hawks and owls are the main enemies of the rattler. Snakes that don't hibernate successfully, ie. they haven't found a nest deep enough or moist enough to protect them from the cold dry winter, will die. So fear not, we will never be overrun by rattlers in Georgian Bay.

You can choose a snake with a history - a long history will be \$30 and a short one just \$10. Your donation will go towards continuing the research on that particular snake. Give it a name when you learn of its habits. Visit it when you are in the area or love it from afar.

Kilbear Provincial Park is accessible by car and boat. To rescue your own pet massasauga write to: Kilbear Provincial park, R.R.#1, Nobel, On., P0G 1G0