

# Desperately seeking snakes

## Two trips to Wainfleet Bog reveal no sign of endangered reptile

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WAINFLEET — Nothing rattles Rob Tervo. Not even the ones on the end of a snake.

Tervo, a natural resources ministry researcher, is part of a team trying to boost the endangered massasauga rattlesnake population in the Wainfleet Bog here near the Lake Erie shore just west of Port Colborne.

Instead of fearing snakes, Tervo thrives on close encounters. He even takes the rattlers home with him.

Tervo and Kim Frolich of the Niagara Region Conservation Authority are leading the annual rattlesnake survey in the bog.

Each Saturday in May, they can be found

with a slew of volunteers walking through the brush and poking sticks into holes and rotting logs in search of the shy but deadly rattlers. In two outings so far this month they have come up empty.

The snake population has declined because much of the bog has been destroyed. Once 30,000 hectares, much of the fertile bog was converted to farmland. Peat mining stripped away a large portion of the bog before the biggest operation closed in 1985.

Last year the team captured five. In the bog, Tervo simply drops the rattlers into a pillow case until the day's search is done. He transfers them to long clear-plastic tubes for safekeeping so they can be studied, measured, weighed and photographed.

This year's search has been unevenful. About 18 people on each of the past two Saturdays have tramped through the bog, coming across only a few milk snakes, garter snakes, toads, frogs and a mallard nest.

The Wainfleet Bog is one of just four areas

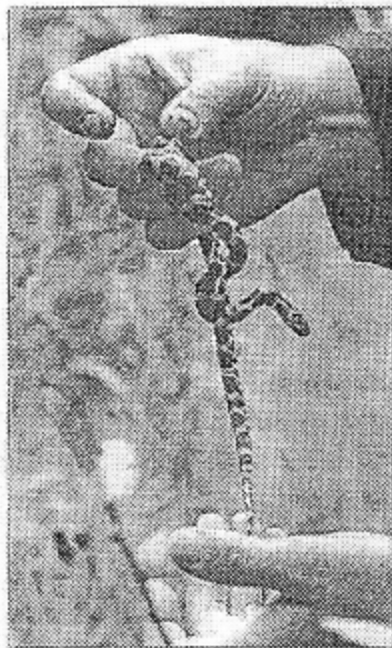
around Ontario where the massasauga rattler is still found. The other sites are in a protected patch of prairie grass in Windsor, along Georgian Bay between Honey Harbour nearly to Sudbury and the near-shore islands and on the Bruce Peninsula between Wiarton and Tobermory.

No one knows how many still exist although they once flourished in southern Ontario. The bog is perfect for the rattlesnake. The wet and springy peat is made up of centuries-old decaying plants and moss. It is a comfortable hibernating spot.

The protected area of the bog covers less than 1,200 hectares in plots purchased by natural resources, the conservation authority and the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

Although discouraged by not finding any rattlers yet this month, neither Tervo nor Frolich are afraid that the snake population is hissing-tory.

For more information, call Kim Frolich at 905-788-3135, ext. 241.



CHARMING: A researcher points out the difference between this milk snake and the massasauga rattlesnake.

SNOWBOG/STYLING BY THE LIGHTS OF STARS