

# Fact Sheet

# Feuille de renseignements



Ministry of Natural Resources

Ministère des Richesses naturelles

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## PROTECTING ONTARIO'S SPECIES AT RISK

*Ontario is home to more than 30,000 species – all important to the biological, social and economic vitality of the province. At present, more than 175 of these species are identified as being at risk, which means they may disappear from the province if their rate of decline continues.*

**The following is a sample of species currently protected under Ontario legislation.**

### ATLANTIC SALMON

The Atlantic salmon is the only salmon native to Ontario. Abundant at the time of European settlement in the early 1700s, the population began to decline by the mid-1800s as land was cleared, water quality declined and dams blocked fish passage. In spite of various hatchery stockings, which began in 1866, the last Atlantic salmon was removed from the Lake Ontario basin before 1900.

As a top predator, the Atlantic salmon had a key ecological role in maintaining a healthy native fish community. It was also an important source of food for both native peoples and early settlers. As such, this species is a significant part of the natural and cultural heritage of the Lake Ontario basin. Restoring the Atlantic salmon would be a significant milestone towards improving Ontario's biodiversity.

The Ministry of Natural Resources is setting direction for a salmon restoration program with a number of partners, including the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, LCBO and Australia's Banrock Station wine company. Other partners and sponsors committed to the project include the Canadian Sportfishing Industry Association, Trout Unlimited Canada, Fleming College, Trees Ontario Foundation, Fishing Forever Foundation and local conservation authorities and community groups. This long-term process is expected to take 15 to 20 years.

### PEREGRINE FALCON

The peregrine falcon is a fast-flying raptor with long, pointed wings; a long narrow tail; quick, powerful wing beats, and a distinctive dark facial mask including heavy dark "sideburns." Adults are slate-gray on the back, with a light-coloured barred breast. Younger birds are brown with a heavily streaked breast.

In the wild, peregrine falcons nest on high, steep cliff edges near lakes and rivers. Some peregrine falcons have adapted to city environments, where pigeons and other city-dwelling birds are easy prey and the ledges of tall buildings provide good nesting sites. The peregrine can dive at speeds of up to 300 kilometres an hour, literally knocking its prey out of the air.

The peregrine falcon was once on the brink of extinction, largely due to the widespread use of chlorinated hydrocarbon pesticides such as DDT in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1973, it was regulated under Ontario's Endangered Species Act. Recovery efforts have been underway for more than 25 years, involving the Ministry of Natural Resources and many partners including Ontario Nature, Canadian Wildlife Service, Bird Studies Canada, conservation authorities, naturalist clubs, volunteers and the Canadian Peregrine Foundation.

Through the combined efforts of the Ontario government and these partners, the peregrine falcon has made a remarkable recovery. There are now more than 70 pairs of peregrine falcons in Ontario. As a result of this success, the species was reclassified from Endangered to Threatened in June 2006. The peregrine falcon continues to be protected from hunting, trapping and nest disturbance as a Specially Protected Raptor under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act.

### **AMERICAN BADGER**

The American badger is a stout, short-legged carnivore with gray fur and distinctive black and white stripes on the head and face. The badger is a powerful digger, using its long front claws to create underground dens or burrow out small rodents which are its main source of food. Badgers are mainly nocturnal but are often active in the early morning.

Small populations of badgers live in tallgrass prairie patches, sand barrens and farmlands in northwestern and southwestern Ontario. It is likely that badgers were never seen in great numbers in Ontario and populations have continued to decline. At present, it is estimated that fewer than 200 of these animals live in the province. The badger has few natural enemies, but its habit of travelling long distances in search of food makes it a frequent casualty of road vehicles. The other main threat to the badger is habitat loss.

In 2003, a provincial team of experts was formed to develop a recovery strategy for the American badger. The team is coordinating research and monitoring efforts to reduce threats, promote habitat restoration and, ultimately, achieve successful recovery of this animal.

### **PROTHONOTARY WARBLER**

The prothonotary warbler is a brightly coloured songbird that inhabits swampy deciduous woodlands in the Carolinian Zone of southwestern Ontario. Both males and females have brilliant golden yellow heads and under parts, olive-green backs, azure blue wings and tails, and large white tail spots. It is the only cavity-nesting warbler in North America, often selecting an existing hole in the trunk of a decaying tree.

The prothonotary warbler is a small bird, weighing about 14 grams and measuring about 14 cm long. The male's distinctive territorial song is a loud, ringing "tsweet-tsweet-tsweet-tsweet," repeated four to six times.

The current population of this bird is restricted to five known sites along and adjacent to the Lake Erie shoreline. It is estimated that perhaps 100 pairs once existed in this region, but today only about 20 pairs occupy nesting sites in any given year. Factors contributing to the decline of this warbler include significant habitat loss and degradation, and competition from other species such as the house wren and brown-headed cowbird.

A draft recovery plan has been prepared by the Prothonotary Warbler Recovery Team, led by Bird Studies Canada and in partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and the Canadian Wildlife Service. The long-term goal is a population of 40 breeding pairs in Ontario.

### **GREY FOX**

The grey fox has a salt-and-pepper coat with a reddish chest and sides, a black-tipped tail, white under-parts and a prominent black stripe running the length of its back. It is smaller than the red fox, with paw prints resembling those of a cat with claws showing.

The grey fox prefers deciduous forests and marshes. It may also be found in agricultural areas and on the outskirts of towns and cities. The grey fox climbs trees to escape enemies and preys on small mammals, birds and insects, mostly at night.

Little is known about historic population trends of the grey fox. Archaeological evidence indicates that it may have been almost as common as the red fox prior to European settlement. Since then, there appears to have been a periodic influx from the United States, where it is relatively common. Climate may be an important factor influencing long-term population trends of grey fox in Ontario.

The only known resident breeding population for grey fox in the province is in southwestern Ontario.

### **BLANDING'S TURTLE**

The Blanding's turtle is easily identified by its bright yellow throat and jaw. Its smooth, domed shell has been compared to a military helmet. This medium-sized turtle prefers shallow wetland areas with abundant vegetation. It may also spend much of its time in upland areas moving between wetlands. In a single season, this highly mobile turtle has been known to travel up to seven kilometres in search of food or a mate.

The Blanding's turtle is found throughout the Great Lakes Basin. In Ontario, this includes the southern and central portions of the province except along the Bruce Peninsula and the far southeast. The total Canadian Great Lakes/St Lawrence population of this endangered species is estimated to be about 10,000. This number will likely continue to decline due to ongoing loss and fragmentation of its habitat.

The colourful and friendly Blanding's turtle is an easy target for pet trade collectors. Because the turtle is long-lived and does not reproduce until about 14 to 25 years of age, this illegal activity can have a severe impact on the survival of the species in the wild. The loss of even a few adults can have a great impact on a local population.

### **BIRD'S-FOOT VIOLET**

The bird's-foot violet is a small perennial plant that flowers in the spring and again in the fall. The flowers range from purple to white, and the deeply dissected leaves resemble the toes of a bird. When the ripe seed pods open, the tiny copper-coloured seeds may be catapulted up to five metres from the parent plant.

In Ontario, the bird's-foot violet is found only in the southwest where it grows in several small scattered populations in open black oak savanna habitat. This lightly forested grassy habitat is also provincially rare, as only a tiny remnant of Ontario's black oak savanna remains from pre-settlement times.

The largest populations of this violet in Ontario are found on publicly owned lands, but threats to this species still include invasive shrubs and the natural succession of its habitat of open fields gradually returning to forest.

For more information about Ontario's species at risk, visit the ministry's website at [www.ontario.ca/speciesatrisk](http://www.ontario.ca/speciesatrisk).

**Note to editors:** High resolution photos of these species are available at [www.ontario.ca/speciesatrisk](http://www.ontario.ca/speciesatrisk).

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