

Turtle Tias have helped 140 hatchlings get to safety



Why did the turtle cross the road?

Without Aurora's Turtle Tias, you might have to go a bit further afield to get an answer.

The Turtle Tias, a five-member group of volunteers Pipette Eibel, Wendy Kenyon, Flo Leava, Rebecca Prins, and Marcella Saucedo, dedicated to protecting turtle nests and their resulting hatchlings throughout Aurora, was recognized by the Town with the 2021 Green Award.

Part of the Town's Community Recognition Awards program, the Green Award is presented to an individual or organization that supports the "protection, preservation, sustainability, or conservation" of the natural environment "while celebrating "those who share the Town's commitment to creating a greener community."

"The Turtle Tias have worked countless hours ensuring the snapping turtle and the painted turtle populations are safe and preserved," said Mayor Mrakas in his virtual presentation of the award. "The group identified that the survival of these turtles is critical in ensuring sustainable wetlands here in Aurora.

"The group has placed 30 nesting cages along Henderson Drive and an additional nine others along the trail system in the Aurora Community Arboretum. The purpose of these nesting cages is to protect the adult female turtles, their eggs, and their eventual hatchlings from the danger of predators and other harmful elements. Rain or shine [they] are out to monitor these nesting cages to ensure they have not been disturbed by predators. Once the hatchlings arrive, the Tias are there to give them a head-start on life by directing them to the nearest wetlands and away from busy streets. The turtles don't reach maturity until they are 15 [and] that means 15 years of avoiding hazards before they can lay eggs of their own.

"The safety of these hatchlings and adult turtles is critical to sustain the population. It has been identified to take nearly 60 years and 1,500 eggs to replace a single female adult. Recently, the group was able to lead the successful release of 140 turtle hatchlings, which has and will continue to make a significant impact in the environmental wellbeing of our community."

The five Tias accepted the award while outlining their work, with Pipette emphasizing their "monitoring, protection, data collection and community involvement" while Marcella extolled the importance of nesting cages to protect the clutch of eggs from predation.

"In the last two years, we have protected 45 nests and saved over 400 hatchlings," said Wendy.

Added Rebecca: "Turtles are an integral part of our wetlands. Please help us in our efforts to protect the turtles of Aurora."

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter