

November weather spells a troublesome time for turtles

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Credit: University of Western Sydney

November is Turtle Month, and according to a Western Sydney University researcher it is also an important time to be on the look-out for our river-dwelling friends.

Associate Professor Ricky Spencer from the School of Science and Health says November is a very dangerous time for turtles.

"Most turtles throughout the country are triggered to nest when the spring storms hit," says Dr Spencer.

"They leave the safety of the water to lay their eggs on dry land and in doing so they often come into contact with urban developments, foxes and cars."

Dr Spencer is the creator of [TurtleSAT](#) (opens in new window) – a mobile app and website that encourages citizen scientists and the general community to log their sightings of turtles.

Since the app was launched in 2015, more than 5000 sightings have been recorded – including indications that thousands of turtles are being killed on roads throughout South-Eastern Australia.

"Roads such as The Northern Road in Western Sydney, the Hume Highway between Sydney and Melbourne, and highways throughout the Murray River are major hotspots for turtle tragedy," says Dr Spencer.

"Most concerning is that the majority of turtles killed on roads are old females looking for nesting sites for their eggs."



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Dr Spencer says expanding urban populations, pest animals and deteriorating water quality are leading [freshwater turtles](#) – a once common, widespread species – to become locally extinct.

In a desperate bid to halt their decline, Western Sydney University researchers are calling upon the support of passionate volunteers and [citizen scientists](#) throughout the country, to download TurtleSAT and continue to report their turtle sightings.

"We are essentially calling on the power of the people to save Australian turtles. We want people to watch out for turtles and use the TurtleSAT app to record where they see them," says Dr Spencer.

"The European Red Fox destroys more than 95% of turtle nests each year. If you see a hole in the ground with small egg shells nearby, it is a

turtle nest – record that into TurtleSAT too."

Dr Spencer praises the efforts of passionate groups of volunteers, working to ensure that these threatened species remain on the planet.



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Graham Stockfeld is President of Turtles Australia – a volunteer group which records more than 500 turtle nests into TurtleSAT each year and distributes turtle nest protection kits to schools.

With the help of Western Sydney University and Charles Sturt University, Turtles Australia are also looking to create a 'Turtles in the Classroom' program where schools will be at the forefront of hatchling turtle releases for conservation.

Shane Davies and Kane Durant from Turtle Rescues NSW are part of a team that conduct last-minute rescues as developers drain and fill in swamps and wetlands throughout the Sydney basin.

With plans for the airport at Badgerys Creek and further expansion of new suburbs throughout north and south-western Sydney, volunteers from Turtle Rescues NSW will be flat out saving thousands of freshwater turtles over the next decade.

"Because most turtles are not currently classified as threatened or endangered, they are pretty much missed in Environment Impact Statements," said Mr Davies.

"When developers start dredging wetlands, turtles like Eastern Long-Necked turtles are killed, and when they start pumping the water out, the [turtles](#) head onto busy roads, where most get killed."



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