

Shell Yeah!

The Amazing Turtles of Cape St. Claire

Brendan M. Curran

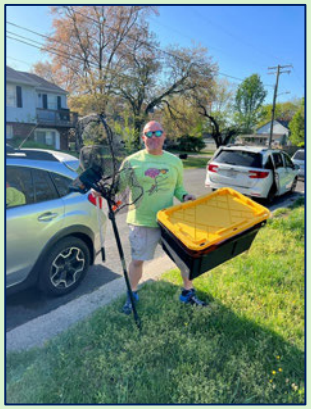
06 November 2026

About Me

- Brendan M. Curran
- Retired U.S. Army Officer
- Senior Analyst & Engineer at the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory
- Cape resident since 2019
- Maryland Department of Natural Resources Master Naturalist
- Board Member, Mid-Atlantic Turtle & Tortoise Society
- Degrees? Yes. In anything related to turtles, biology, or environmental science? No.
- Developed a love and passion for turtles through my 3rd grade science teacher (Mr. Hogan)







Turtle 101

- Reptiles, cold blooded (ectothermic)
- Date back to Triassic Period (220+ million years!)
- Live between 20 – 50 yrs in wild (some 100+ in captivity)
- Maryland is home to 18* different species and subspecies of turtles
- May take years to reach sexual maturity. For example, Eastern Box Turtles:
  - Males: 5 – 10 yrs
  - Females: 7 – 13 yrs
  - Females lay 3 – 6 eggs annually
- Turtles go into brumation during winter months
- Omnivorous
- Most encounters occur in spring when turtles are:
  - In search of a mate
  - Movement to nesting site
- Horrible at martial arts



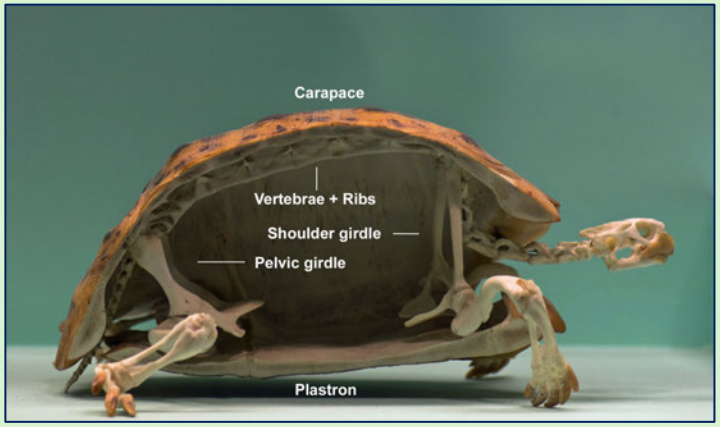
Photo by B. Curran

Turtles vs Tortoises

- All tortoises are *technically* a type of turtle, but not all turtles are tortoises
- They are both in the reptile order Testudines (Chelonia)

Turtles	*Tale of the Tape*	Tortoises
Water	**Habitat**	Land
Flat(er)	**Shell Shape**	Heavy, Domed
Webbed	**Feet**	Stumped
Omnivores	**Diet**	Herbivores
20 – 50 yrs*	**Lifespan**	100+ yrs

Turtle Anatomy & Biology







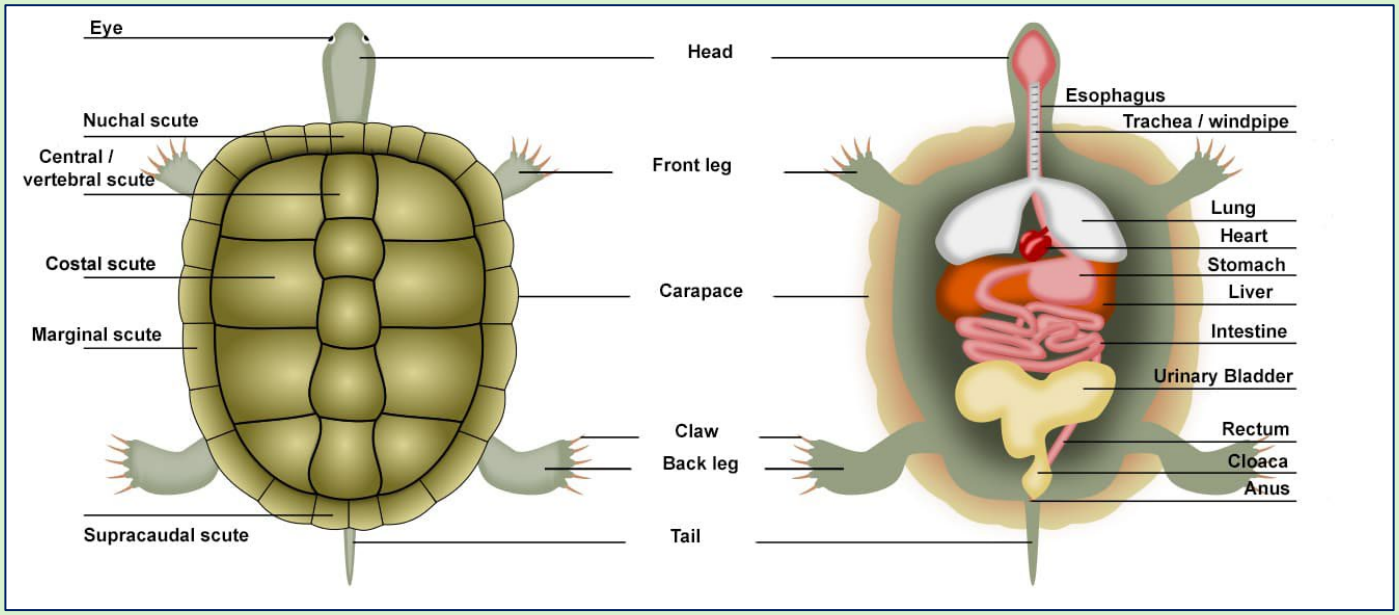




Photo by B. Curran

Role in Ecosystem



Photo by Tony Prochaska



Photo by Linh Phu



Photo by Steve Badger

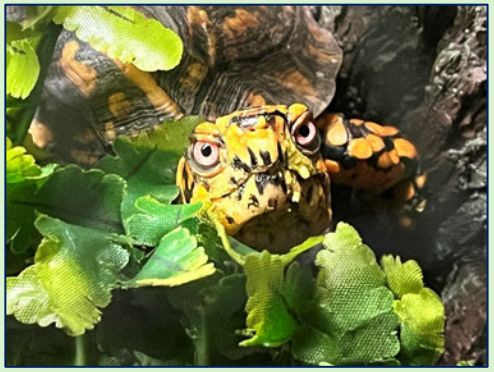
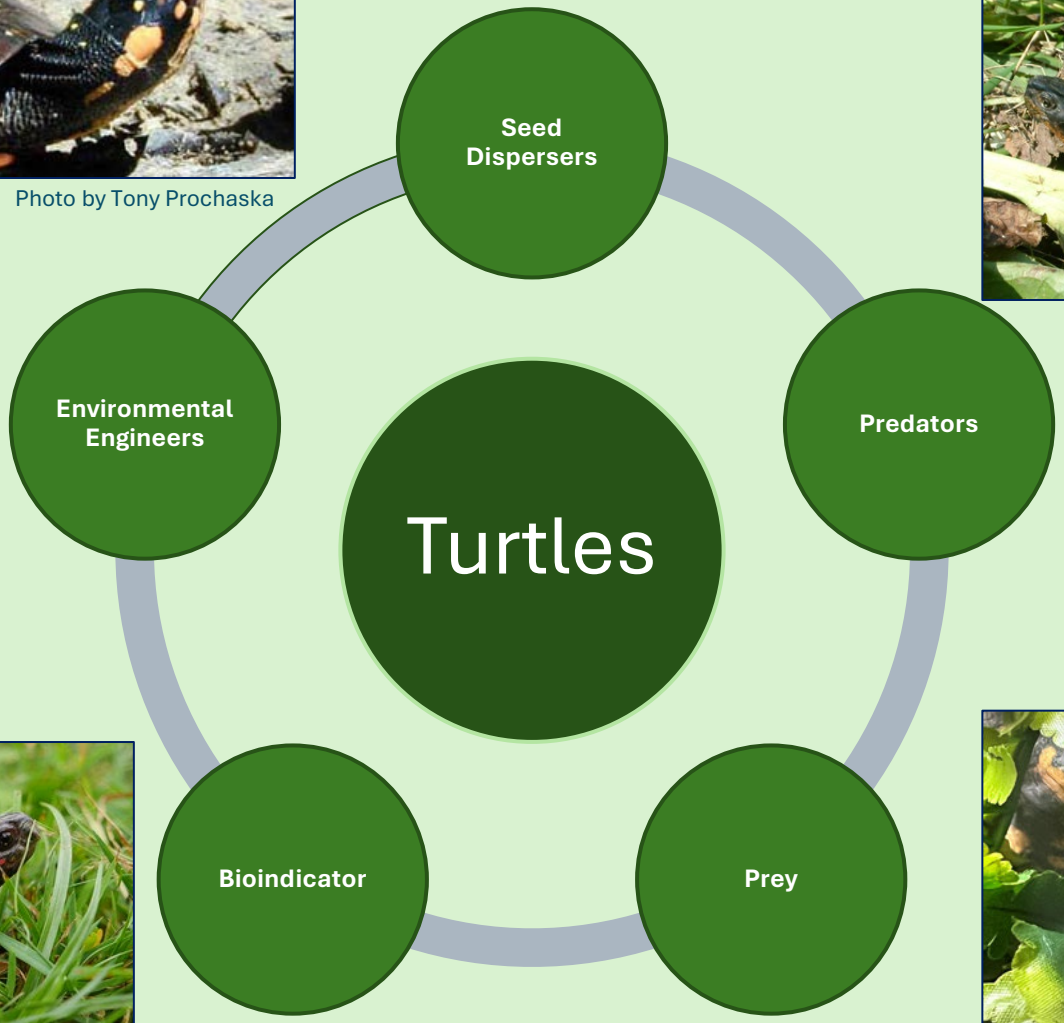


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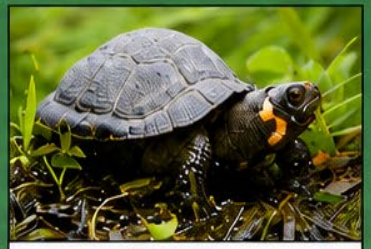
Turtles of Maryland



Diamondback Terrapin
(*Malaclemys terrapin*)



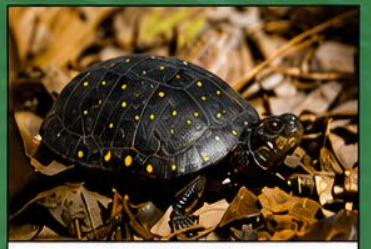
Eastern Box Turtle
(*Terrapene carolina*)



Bog Turtle
(*Glyptemys muhlenbergii*) S2 | A



Wood Turtle
(*Glyptemys insculpta*) S2S3



Spotted Turtle
(*Clemmys guttata*) S3S4



Eastern Painted Turtle
(*Chrysemys picta picta*)



Midland Painted Turtle
(*Chrysemys picta marginata*)



Northern Map Turtle
(*Graptemys geographica*) S1 | I



Northern Red-bellied Cooter
(*Pseudemys rubriventris*)



Snapping Turtle
(*Chelydra serpentina*)



Yellow-bellied Slider
(*Trachemys scripta scripta*)

Invasive



Red-eared Slider
(*Trachemys scripta elegans*)

Invasive



Eastern Mud Turtle
(*Kinosternon subrubrum*)



Striped Mud Turtle
(*Kinosternon baurii*) S3



Eastern Musk Turtle
(*Sternotherus odoratus*)

MARYLAND
Department of Natural Resources



Spiny Softshell
(*Apalone spinifera*) S2 | S3

Legend: symbols apply to the entire poster unless otherwise noted.

State Endangered	=	Imperiled in Maryland	= S1
State Threatened	=	Vulnerable in Maryland	= S2
State Species of Special Concern	=	Rare in Maryland	= S3
Highly State Conservation Priority	=	In Need of Conservation	= S4

* See reverse side for notes *

Photos by Kevin Enge; Bryan Henson; J.D. Kleopfer; Chris Lukhaup; Mike Pingleton; Bill Radke; Richard Smith; John White
DNR 10/2023

Cape Natives

- Eastern Box Turtle
- Common Snapping Turtle
- Eastern Painted Turtle
- Diamondback Terrapin
- Northern Red – bellied Cooter
- Eastern Mud Turtle
- Striped Mud Turtle

Note: Turtles are notorious for ignoring native range maps



Photos from https://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/Pages/plants_wildlife/herps/FieldGuide_OrderTestudines.aspx

Cape's Invasive Turtles

- Red – Eared Slider
- Yellow – Bellied Slider









Now stay tuned for a special rant on aquatic turtles in pet trade

Habitats

Aquatic

- Seasonal & permanent wetlands
- Wet meadows, bogs, & fens
- Small streams, springs, seeps
- Rivers

Terrestrial

- Hardwood forest
- Agricultural lands
- Urban & residential systems



Photo by MD DNR



Photo by B. Curran



Photo by MD DNR



Photo by MD DNR

Conservation Challenges



Top Local Threats



Photo by Google Maps



Photo by MD DNR



Photo by Ecosystems-Julie



Photos by B. Curran



Photo by Joyce Stevens



Photo by B. Curran



Photo by MD DNR



Photo by ChatGPT

Encountering Turtles

On the road

- Move in the direction of travel

In your backyard or out on a walk

- Make sure it's safe from pets/children/hazards
- Keep handling to a minimum
- Photograph *in situ*, when possible
- Do not disturb hibernacula (don't dig them up)
- Don't share locality information
- Let it be!

Never take wild turtles home!

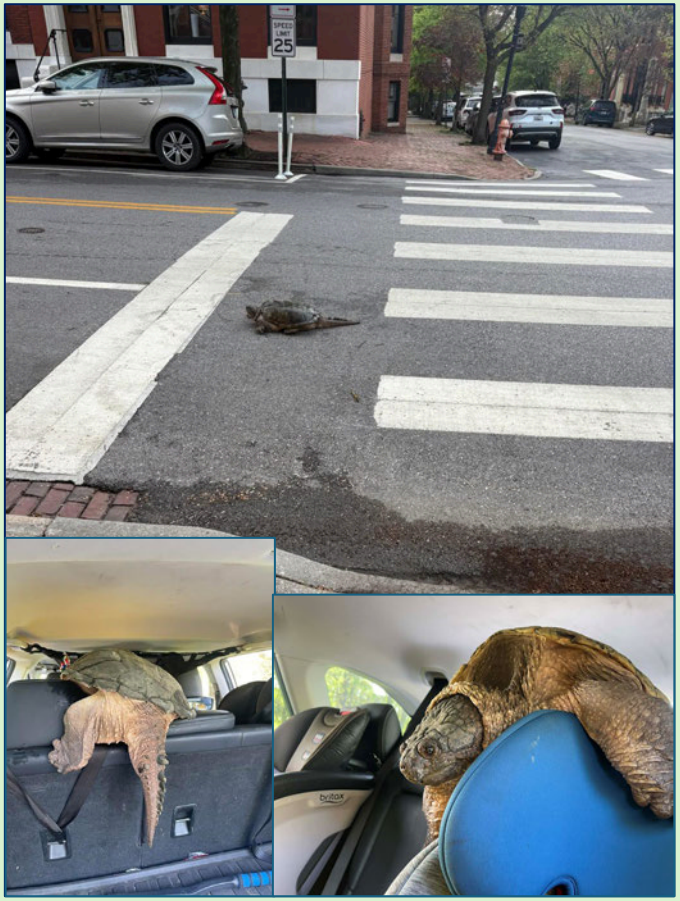


Photo by B. Curran

Wrangling Snapping Turtles

Keys to moving turtles

1. Safety first!
2. Grasp/pick-up turtles from rear of shell
3. If too large, jockey onto vehicle floor mat, blanket, etc. and drag
4. Move turtle in the direction of original travel
5. If in a dangerous area, move to safe *nearby* habitat



Photos by Aaron Zelinsky



Photo by Central MS Turtle Rescue

Encountering Injured Turtles



Common Injuries & Ailments

Aural (ear) abscess in juvenile Eastern Box Turtle (Calvert County)



Photo by B. Curran

Lawnmower strike on adult female Eastern Box Turtle (Anne Arundel County)



Photo by B. Curran

Respiratory infection in Eastern Mud Turtle (Dorchester County)

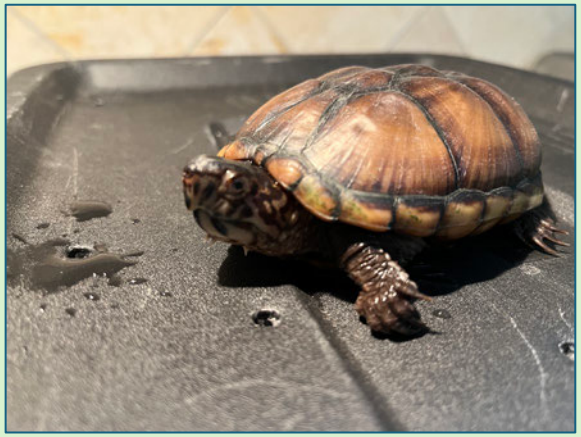


Photo by B. Curran

Keys

- Take note of location
- Secure
- Contact professionals

All turtles pictured recovered and where returned to where found

Professional Resources

Chadwell Animal Hospital
(443) 512-2751

Frisky's Wildlife (Woodstock)
(410) 418-8899

Second Chance (Clarksburg)
(301) 926-9453

Be a Turtle Ally

1. Keep locations of wild turtles secret (especially online!)
2. When safe, help turtles cross the road
3. Be a responsible turtle owner – don't release pets into wild
4. If you suspect illegal collecting or selling of wild turtles, contact the **Maryland Wildlife Crime Stoppers @ (443) 433-4112**
5. Be a good neighbor – create a turtle friendly yard (and volunteer with Cape Conservation Corps!)



Photo by B. Curran



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Creating a Turtle Friendly Yard

1. Create Shelter (brush piles, leave leaves)
2. Provide clean water source at ground level
3. Plant natives (plants and food sources)
4. Survey your yard before you mow
5. Avoid pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizer

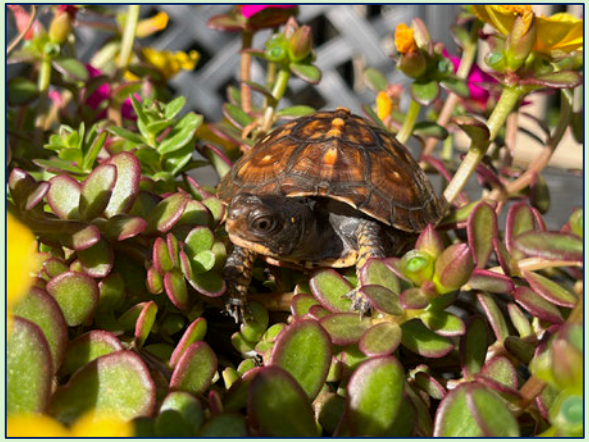


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Maryland's Laws & Regulations



- MD DNR is in the process of changing it's regulation due to conservation concerns
- Comment period closes 27 November 2026
- Learn more about proposed changes: https://regs.maryland.gov/us/md/exec/comar/08.03.11

Reading is Fundamental

Think critically, logically, and remember.....

DON'T TAKE TURTLES FROM WILD OR RELEASE PET TURTLES INTO WILD!



Additional Resources

- State of Maryland
  - MD DNR Wildlife & Heritage Services (https://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/)
- Associations & Societies
  - Mid-Atlantic Turtle & Tortoise Society (https://matts-turtles.org/)
    - matts.inquiries@gmail.com
  - Turtle Survival Alliance (https://turtlesurvival.org/)
  - Turtle & Tortoise Preservation Group (https://ttpg.org/)

Professional Rehabbers

- Chadwell Animal Hospital (Bel Air)
  - (443) 512-2751
- Frisky's Wildlife (Woodstock)
  - (410)418-8899
- Second Chance (Clarksburg)
  - (301) 926-9453



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Become a Master Naturalist

Would you like a chance to learn more about the natural world and our place in it? Would you volunteer your time to share the wonder of nature with others, to assist in ecological research, and strive to make your community a healthier, happier place?

If you answered ‘yes’ to these questions, you may have the makings of a Maryland Master Naturalist!

For more information on the Maryland Master Naturalist Program, policies, fees, application process and class details, visit the University of Maryland Extension at:

https://extension.umd.edu/programs/environment-natural-resources/program-areas/master-naturalist-program/



Image by B. Curran

Questions

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