

Operation Terrapin Rescue



Volunteer Instructions

Updated May 2020

Diamond-backed terrapins at Port Mahon need your help! Female terrapins at Port Mahon face several challenges as they attempt to nest in early summer. Not only must they cross a road to get to their nesting habitat, but they must also navigate rock piles that prevent erosion of the road due to rising sea levels. Unfortunately, a combination of vehicle strikes and getting trapped in the rocks has led to increased mortality of terrapins. Until a permanent solution can be implemented, we have launched Operation Terrapin Rescue to minimize human impacts on the terrapin population

Operation Terrapin Rescue is a volunteer program. The objective is to help diamond-backed terrapins move safely between the Delaware Bay and their nesting sites at Port Mahon, while also collecting accurate and valuable data on their movements. We will also be evaluating the effectiveness of two turtle tunnels installed to assist terrapins with safe passage through the rock piles. Your efforts will help us better understand these issues at Port Mahon—information we will use to guide our decision making at solving this problem—and will help reduce mortality of nesting females.

HOW TO SIGN UP: If you are interested in participating in this program, please contact Nate Nazdrowicz (Nathan.Nazdrowicz@delaware.gov).

VOLUNTEER INFORMATION:

- **Schedule:** Volunteers can sign up for designated shifts using Google Calendar. Each shift is approximately 3 hours long and is centered around high tide, which is when females are most likely to nest.
 - A link for Google Calendar will be provided to all volunteers in the project introductory email or you can request the link by contacting Nate Nazdrowicz.
 - High tide does not always occur during daylight hours, so some shifts may be shorter and/or focus on looking for terrapins in rocks that might have moved early in the morning or the night before.

- There will be days when many terrapins are active and days when none or very few are seen.
- You are welcome to extend your survey effort before or after the designated shift time if you feel like you want to stay longer or if there are few terrapins present. Also, if the shift time doesn't fit your schedule we encourage you to still go out and survey during a time that works best for you. Just make sure to record your start and end times on your data sheet.
- Feel free to sign up for dates that people are already signed up for, the more people on site the better!
- **Work in pairs:** We strongly recommend working in pairs or small groups both for safety and efficiency. At times there will be large numbers of terrapins moving and multiple people might be needed to keep up with the turtles.
- **Datasheets:** You are provided with data sheets to fill out on each survey visit. Please familiarize yourself with the data fields and the road segments *before* you start the survey. It would be a good idea to have one person in your survey pair/group record data while others survey.

HOW TO SURVEY:

- You can survey from your car, by bike, or by foot but please be aware that there will be other vehicles using the road and try not to block other vehicles.
- Begin surveying at the starting point, road segment 1, and follow the road making sure to collect and record data for the segment you are in until you reach the end point, which is the parking lot at the end of the road.
- Please also record any terrapin observations from the entrance road as you drive in.
- You will be surveying back and forth along the road so make sure that you are recording data in the correct road section of the data sheet, each section is marked on the map and starts/ends at major landmarks (e.g., piers, telephone poles) along the road. Telephone poles are also marked with spray paint.
 - You will be looking for terrapins that are moving across the road and also looking for them climbing through or stuck in the rocks along the road. As you see terrapins trying to get to the bay, please stop when it's safe to do so and help the terrapin reach its destination.
 - At busy times, you will be stopping often.

- ***Do not disturb nesting females:*** It is very important to not disturb terrapins that are actively nesting. Please only assist turtles found in the rocks, on the road, or right along the margin.
- It is recommended that you survey on foot in the areas where large rocks line the road.
 - If you listen, sometimes you can hear the terrapins in the rocks trying to climb out. It is a good idea to bring a flashlight to examine the cracks between the rocks.
- We will be monitoring the terrapin's use of two "turtle tunnels" in the rocks. Both of the tunnels are located in road segment 2. Please document any terrapins actively using the tunnels, so be sure to stop and look down each tunnel each time you pass. If terrapins are close to the tunnels but not actively using it, please wait and watch the terrapin to see if it is able to find the tunnel on its own. If terrapins are unable to locate the entrance to the tunnel you can help direct them towards it or place them at the entrance and allow them to pass though. Please take lots of notes, the more information we have about the terrapin's usage of these tunnels the better!
- If you notice that the turtle tunnels are beginning to fill with sand and other debris please do your best to remove it so that the turtles will have a clear path. This can be done by hand at entrance/exit of the tunnels but you will need something longer to reach the center of the tunnel. If you notice the tunnel is clogged and you are unable to unclog it please call us so that we can come out and fix it as soon as possible.
- **For road-killed terrapins:** Please remove them from the road. You can put them in the marsh so that they do not get counted a second time.
- **For injured terrapins:** You might encounter injured terrapins. Unless one is very seriously injured, it is best to return any terrapins to the edge of the bay and allow them to heal their wounds naturally, which they are very good at!
 - Call Vickie Henderson, Licensed Wildlife Rehabilitator, (302) 632-0304 if you find a seriously injured turtle.
- If you are experiencing a large volume of terrapins moving during your shift and need assistance to keep up with the flow of terrapins please feel free to call and we can come out and assist you.
 - Nate Nazdrowicz (302) 735-8688
- **Take lots of notes:** We encourage you to take as many notes as possible on the datasheet while you are surveying. You can never have too much data! If you need additional space for taking notes please use the back of the datasheet.

- **Safety First!:** While we would like to reduce terrapin mortality, your safety and the safety of others is most important.
 - Port Mahon Road is a public road. Please obey all traffic laws, avoid sudden stops, and be alert while walking in or crossing the road.
 - Use extreme caution when climbing on rocks, these rocks are loose and may shift under your feet.
 - This area may be very “buggy” so come prepared. If there is some wind, it will help with the flies, gnats, and mosquitoes but make sure to bring bug spray or long sleeves.
 - The terrapins are nice and rarely bite, but their claws are sharp so you might want to consider wearing work gloves when picking them up.

PAPERWORK NEEDED:

Please completely fill out **volunteer time sheets** and **data sheets** and return to:

Nate Nazdrowicz
6180 Hay Point Landing Road
Smyrna, DE 19977

-- OR --

Scan and email to Nathan.nazdrowicz@delaware.gov

Please be sure to return your timesheets (they are very important and allow us to leverage more grant funding for this type of wildlife management). They must be filled out by the volunteer and signed **in ink and the original copy mailed or scanned and emailed to us.**