

www.YearoftheTurtle.org

# Year of the Turtle News

No. 5

May 2011

Basking in the Wonder of Turtles



*Diamondback Terrapins, Malaclemys terrapin, by Scott McDaniel*

## World Turtle Day

**Don't forget – May 23 is World Turtle Day!**

World Turtle Day, sponsored every year since 2000 by American Tortoise Rescue, was established to bring attention to, and increase knowledge of and respect for, turtles and tortoises. Turtle Day is celebrated worldwide in a variety of ways, including dressing up as turtles, assisting turtles crossing roadways (when conditions are safe), and taking part in research activities (such as citizen science volunteer programs). Do you have plans to participate in World Turtle Day? If so, we encourage you to send information to [yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com](mailto:yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com) on how you are participating. We also encourage submission of stories and pictures of your World Turtle Day events and activities after May 23 for highlighting in a future issue of *Year of the Turtle News*. More info on World Turtle Day is available at [www.tortoise.com](http://www.tortoise.com).

## Taking Stock: One Year After the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill

*by Priya Nanjappa, Jim Godwin, and David Dimitrie*

The Deepwater Horizon explosion and oil spill that began on April 20, 2010 was an incident of unprecedented magnitude. In its aftermath, attention focused on the disastrous effects of oiled marshes, soiled beaches, and devastated economies dependent upon natural resources. As herpetologists, many of us and our colleagues were also particularly interested in how the spread of oil would affect sea turtles and Diamondback Terrapins occurring in those coastal zones. Although we do not have the full answer yet, as you will read below, considerable work is ongoing to monitor turtles in this region and to maintain those species of greatest conservation concern.

Because of the ongoing investigations and legal matters pertaining to this spill, it is difficult to get an unvarnished assessment of how these animals

are doing, one year later. As we all saw in photos that were on the news and internet, many individual oiled animals were observed and cleaned if possible. However, the overall impact is yet to be determined, as the oiling of habitats and animals continues to occur. We present here a snapshot of what is happening across the Gulf Coast states, and we thank our friends and colleagues in

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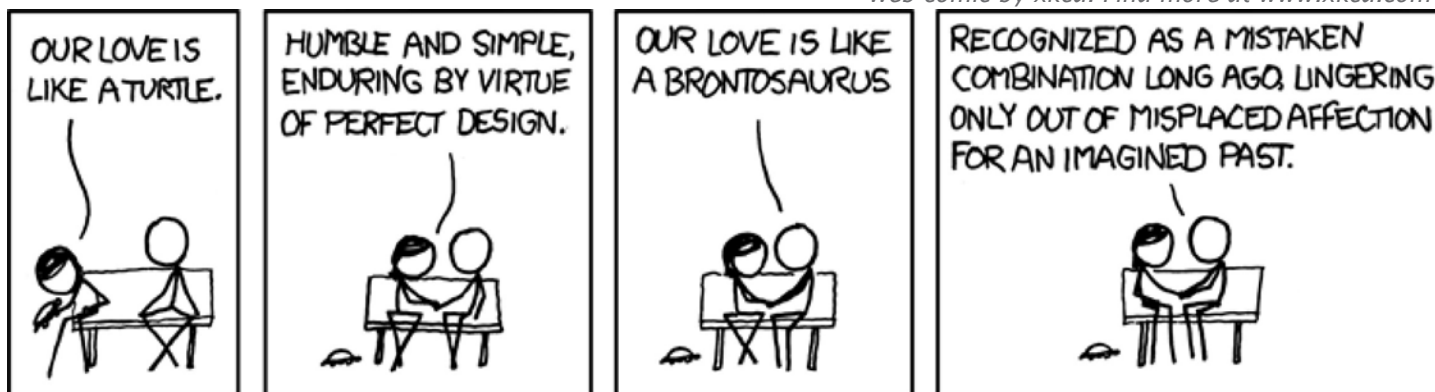


*Emydoidea blandingii, Blanding's Turtle, by Ryan Miller*

**“Behold the turtle. He makes progress when his neck is out.”** — James Bryant Conant (1893-1978), educator and scientist

## Brontosaurus

Web comic by xkcd. Find more at [www.xkcd.com](http://www.xkcd.com)



## Submit Your Turtle Art, Stories, and Poetry

### Get Your May Calendar!

This month's calendar photo contest winner is Sara Viernum. Sara is a herpetologist and enjoys working with all kinds of reptiles and amphibians, especially salamanders. She attended school in the Southeastern US and studied the natural history and habitat selection of the green salamander (*Aneides aeneus*). Sara currently lives in Portland, Oregon where she is busy learning about the diversity of herpetofauna of the Pacific Northwest. See this month's winner (above) and runner-up at [www.parcplace.org/YOTYearoftheTurtleCalendarMay.pdf](http://www.parcplace.org/YOTYearoftheTurtleCalendarMay.pdf)



Loggerhead Musk Turttle, *Sternotherus minor minor*, by Sara Viernum.

Do you have a turtle story or piece of art that could be highlighted during the Year of the Turtle? How about poetry, such as this submission by PARC Joint National Steering Committee Co-chair Dede Olson:

*Brilliant turtle photos  
Touch hearts and souls as words can't  
Take my breath away*

Submit your turtle art (in jpg, tiff, or pdf format) and copies of your stories and poems via email to [yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com](mailto:yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com). We will be including submissions in upcoming newsletters and in other Year of the Turtle materials and outreach efforts throughout 2011, and we want your work to be part of it!



This Year of the Turtle sculpture was created by Dede Olson and made its debut at the NW PARC and SNVB/WA TWS meetings in Gig Harbor, Washington, in March. Created out of a disk sled, a plastic bowl, a children's coat rack, and a lot of papier mache, the sculpture comes apart into several pieces, but it still filled up the entire back seat of the car.

## Year of the Turtle Collaborating Partners

The Year of the Turtle Planning Team is pleased to welcome the following organizations to our growing list of collaborating partners:



The **Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD)** is a state agency whose mission is to conserve, enhance, and restore Arizona's diverse wildlife resources and habitats through protection and management programs, and to provide wildlife resources and safe watercraft and off-highway vehicle recreation for the enjoyment, appreciation, and use by present and future generations. AGFD's Turtles Project manages and conserves Arizona's turtle species through statewide population monitoring, creation and implementation of state conservation agreements, public outreach, and coordination between state, federal, and private agencies. [www.azgfd.gov/turtle](http://www.azgfd.gov/turtle).

The **Association of Reptilian & Amphibian Veterinarians (ARAV)** is a not-for-profit international organization of veterinarians, veterinary technicians and students, and herpetologists. The organization was founded in 1991 with the goal to improve reptile and amphibian husbandry and veterinary care through education, exchange of ideas, and research. ARAV promotes conservation and humane treatment of reptiles and amphibians through education, captive breeding, and habitat preservation. ARAV publishes the *Journal of Herpetological Medicine and Surgery*, organizes an annual conference, and provides funding for research. [www.arav.org](http://www.arav.org)



**Biotopo Rain Forest** is a natural reserve that contains habitat with natural formations and very significant flora and fauna species for science and the natural environment. Here, wildlife has been little altered by the actions of man. The reserve has been created with the purpose of providing a protected natural space to conserve a representative sample of the tropical Pacific forests of Nariño in south Colombia. Turtle species here include *Chelydra acutirostris* and *Rhinoclemmys nasuta*. [www.biotopo.es.vg](http://www.biotopo.es.vg)

The **Herpetology Group at the University of Quindio (Grupo de Estudio en Herpetología de la Universidad del Quindio - GEHUQ)** is located in Armenia City, Quindio, Colombia, South America. Our mission is to preserve the amphibians, lizards, snakes and turtles present in the coffee region of Colombia through research, and to educate the community to live alongside them so future generations can know and enjoy them. Our area is home to two species of turtles – *Kinosternon leucostomum* and *Chelydra acutirostris*. [grupoherpetosuniquindio.blogspot.com](http://grupoherpetosuniquindio.blogspot.com)



The **Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW)** is responsible for the conservation of the state's wildlife and the habitats on which wildlife depends for the benefit and enjoyment of citizens and visitors. Year of the Turtle efforts are coordinated through DFW's Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program ([www.nhesp.org](http://www.nhesp.org)) and include agency newsletter articles, training sessions for citizen scientists and utilities staff, technical assistance for property owners, headstarting hatchling programs, production and promotion of turtle events across the state, and creation of turtle publications. [www.mass.gov/masswildlife](http://www.mass.gov/masswildlife)

Our full list of partners can be found at [www.parcplace.org/yearoftheturtlepartners.htm](http://www.parcplace.org/yearoftheturtlepartners.htm). If you are interested in contributing to the Year of the Turtle efforts, please send an email to [yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com](mailto:yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com) with a brief description of your organization and its efforts.

## Taking Stock, continued from p. 1

Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida who are working on turtle conservation efforts in the affected areas, and were gracious enough to provide us with the following information.

The **Louisiana** coast was hardest hit due to its proximity to the spill source; for the same reasons, the state is also heavily involved in the current investigations and legal cases. Our colleagues at the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries provided the following statement:

“Louisiana and other state and federal natural resource trustees are still collecting ephemeral data and assessing injury. Our shoreline and our resources are still experiencing oil and it would be premature at this point in the assessment to draw conclusions regarding the amount of injury or cumulative effects on our resources.”



*Diamondback Terrapin, Malaclemys terrapin, by Andrew Grosse*

**Mississippi** was also affected, and biologists are involved with the region-wide Diamondback Terrapin working group on the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) process for Diamondback Terrapins and are exploring other avenues for studies investigating the impacts of the spill on terrapins. Biologists are also involved in sea turtle NRDA and are closely following



*Green Sea Turtles, Chelonia mydas, by Rick Swart.*

the recent increase in sea turtle deaths occurring along the Mississippi coast. So far there is no evidence this related to the oil spill.

*The overall impact is yet to be determined, as the oiling of habitats and animals continues to occur.*

While **Alabama** beaches and coastal marshes escaped, for the most part, the devastating oiling seen in many parts of coastal Louisiana, its impacts on coastal wildlife are still a concern. Minor oiling occurred in some of the marshes of the Mississippi Sound in south Mobile County where Diamondback Terrapins occur. For five years, Thane Wibbels, Ph.D., and Ken Marion, Ph.D., from the University of Alabama at Birmingham have been studying the abundance and reproduction of the Mississippi Diamondback Terrapin. In collaboration with the region-wide Diamondback Terrapin working group, they contributed to the development of a NRDA for funding consideration. That proposal is targeted at assessing the impact of the oil spill on terrapins in the northern Gulf of Mexico. In the meantime Dr. Wibbels and his colleagues have been using state funding to begin an oil

impact assessment in Alabama. This research includes population and reproduction assessment of terrapins along the Alabama coast. It also includes the evaluation of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon contaminants and stress hormone levels in this species of highest conservation concern in Alabama. **Read more at <http://www.uab.edu/news/reporter/news/item/1102-wibbels-marion-assess-oil-spill%E2%80%99s-impact-on-terrapin-turtle?tmpl=component&print=1>**. The results of the research will provide basic information needed to assess both acute and long-term effects of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill on the Diamondback Terrapin in Alabama.

Also in Alabama, sea turtle nesting has been monitored over the years with the assistance of volunteers along the gulf beaches of the Fort Morgan Peninsula in Baldwin County where the majority of sea turtle nesting



*Loggerhead Sea Turtle (Caretta caretta) nestlings, photo by Andy Adams.*

occurs. Last season, eggs from twenty nests were transported to Florida's Atlantic coast during the worst of the oiling of those beaches. After the major threat of oiling had passed, hatchlings were allowed to emerge and venture off into the Gulf as they would in any other year. Nest monitoring will continue and you can help! Anyone interesting in assisting this program can find more information from "Share The Beach" – one of our featured citizen science programs this month – at <http://www.alabamaseaturtles.com/volunteering/>.



Adult female Alabama Red-bellied Turtle, *Pseudemys alabamensis*.

Sea turtles are all federally listed as either endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act, and thus these species received considerable media attention and public support following the spill. However, comparatively little attention was given to Diamondback Terrapins, a species that lives in estuaries (habitats in inlets and at the mouths of rivers where freshwater and saltwater mix) along the coast. In addition, other turtle species on the fringe of the spill went unnoticed. For one species in particular, the Alabama Red-bellied Turtle (*Pseudemys alabamensis*), the results could have been devastating

had the oil pushed inland into coastal rivers. This federally endangered turtle occupies freshwater rivers that transition to brackish water around the perimeter of Mobile Bay in Alabama and the lower Biloxi and Pascagoula watersheds of Mississippi. In a worst-case scenario strong winds would push oil upriver into the habitat of the Alabama Red-bellied Turtle. In preparation for such an event, oil booms had been deployed across mouths of rivers and tributaries in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta, and around parts of Gravine Island where red-bellied turtles are known to nest.

Thankfully, no Alabama Red-bellied Turtle mortalities due to the oil spill were documented. However, the long-term ecological consequences remain unknown. The proximity of red-bellied turtle habitat to the Gulf raises the possibility that toxic substances could migrate from the Gulf into the adjacent riverine habitat, affecting this species and others in a more insidious fashion.

In **Florida**, the story of ongoing work is similar. Our colleagues there provided the following statement:

"The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) participated in the development of NRDA for Diamondback Terrapins [and other species]. The FWC is still contributing, whenever possible, to the working group of biologists pursuing funding for Diamondback Terrapin NRDA."

So, while we cannot definitively say how these marine and coastal turtles are doing following this massive and disruptive event, we are encouraged that our friends and

colleagues continue to monitor the situation and have initiated some bold actions to forestall potential adverse effects. These turtle species are key components of important and complex coastal ecosystems, and their population health is a reflection on the health of the ecosystem overall. Because of the broad range of potential impacts on these animals, their habitats, and their prey items, it may be several years before we get a clear picture of the future for these turtle populations.

In the meantime, we are heartened by the pieces of good news that continue to emerge, such as the as yet unaffected Alabama Red-bellied Turtles, as well as the news in this video about successful rescue and rehabilitation efforts with sea turtles in Florida: <http://www.eoearth.org/video/view/163919/?topic=53642>.

*The Year of the Turtle Team thanks our friends and colleagues at the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks, the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, Alabama PARC, Southeast PARC, and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for their helpful input on this article.*



Diamondback Terrapin, photo by J.D. Willson.

facebook

Follow all of the Year of the Turtle news and happenings on **Facebook** (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/yearoftheturtle2011>) and **Twitter** (<http://twitter.com/YearOfTheTurtle>).



## Year of the Turtle Calendar Photo Contest Update

The Year of the Turtle Calendar Photo Contest has been a tremendous success thus far. Since December, close to 200 individuals have submitted entries into the contest, and a total of nearly 500 photos have been submitted! Entries have arrived from all across North America, as well as Costa Rica, the Galapagos Islands, the Netherlands, Argentina, Bolivia, and elsewhere around the world. These entries have included fascinating shots of Florida Red-bellied Cooters basking amongst American Alligators, Snapping Turtles crossing the road, and hatchling turtles emerging from their eggs and nests. Species of turtles have ranged from Eastern Box Turtles, Gopher Tortoises, and Red-eared Sliders to Bog Turtles, Western Pond Turtles, Leatherback Sea Turtles, and Leopard Tortoises.

We thank everyone who has contributed photos for the contest and for the Year of the Turtle efforts. However, it's not too late to enter the contest! We are accepting entries all year long. Give us your best shot! For more information and for entry details, please visit [www.parcplace.org/news-a-events/201-2011-year-of-the-turtle-calendar-photo-contest-call-for-photos-.html](http://www.parcplace.org/news-a-events/201-2011-year-of-the-turtle-calendar-photo-contest-call-for-photos-.html).

A selection of our fantastic submissions to date:



Left to right, top to bottom: Anthony Wilson, *Apalone ferox*, Florida Softshell; Andrew Grosse, *Malaclemys terrapin*, Diamondback Terrapin; Tom Diez, *Chrysemys picta picta*, Eastern Painted Turtle; Andy Adams, *Clemmys guttata*, Spotted Turtle; David Burkwall, *Terrapene carolina*, Eastern Box Turtle; Jim Harding, *Emydoidea blandingii*, Blanding's Turtle; Sara Viernum, *Apalone spinifera aspera*, Gulf Coast Spiny Softshell; Jeroen Duncan, *Geochelone nigra*, Galapagos tortoise; Troy Hibbitts, *Graptemys versa*, Texas Map Turtle; Rick Dowling, *Pseudemys concinna*, River Cooters

## Turtles in the News

The Turtle Survival Alliance recently released exciting nesting news for two rare species of Asian river terrapins. Read about this latest news for the critically endangered Burmese Roof Turtle (*Batagur trivittata*) and the Sundarbans River Terrapin (*B. baska*) – one of Asia’s most threatened large river turtles – on the TSA blog at [www.turtlesurvival.org/blog/1-blog/131-exciting-nesting-news-for-two-rare-turtle-species](http://www.turtlesurvival.org/blog/1-blog/131-exciting-nesting-news-for-two-rare-turtle-species).

*Cuora picturata*, the Vietnamese Box Turtle, has been discovered for the first time in the wild. Previously only known from trade markets in Asia, the species has been located on the Langbian Plateau in southern Vietnam. Read all the details on this latest discovery from Wired Science at [www.wired.com/wiredscience/2011/04/vietnamese-box-turtle/](http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/2011/04/vietnamese-box-turtle/).

### USA Turtle Mapping Project: Turtle Steps, Slow but Sure!

Help Wanted: We are seeking a few more volunteers from around the USA to help organize and ‘roll-out’ our mapping project. In particular, we would like a:

- Southeastern USA regional turtle mapping leader
- Southwestern USA regional turtle mapping leader

These ‘leaders’ would help us to collect and map locations of selected turtle species among US States in their region. We have identified leaders for the Northeast, Midwest, and Northwest (thanks folks!).

Other types of help with this effort can always be used, and if you are interested in assisting in another capacity, such as for a region in a non-leader role or for a particular species, please let us know ([dedeolson@fs.fed.us](mailto:dedeolson@fs.fed.us)). In addition, several Citizen Science groups, nature centers, and municipalities have taken up the call for new information and are doing BioBlitzes or planned surveys in their area to collect turtle locality data. If you are interested in organizing such an event, please find the data we are hoping to collect and the species that we are targeting at: <http://parcplace.org/news-a-events/year-of-the-turtle/203.html>. At the end of your effort, send completed data forms to: [dedeolson@fs.fed.us](mailto:dedeolson@fs.fed.us).

And please, SAFETY FIRST!

Ongoing efforts to capture the Hoan Kiem turtle in Vietnam in order to begin medical treatment finally have proven successful, as the giant turtle was captured on April 3. Plans and attempts to capture and treat the 440-pound turtle for ailments have been ongoing over the previous several months. The full story from Time can be accessed at [www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2063308,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2063308,00.html).

And, for laughs, see why “turtles have it figured out, man” in a comic from [xkcd.com](http://xkcd.com), available at [www.xkcd.com/889/](http://www.xkcd.com/889/).

If you have items you would like to contribute to Turtles in the News, please send them for consideration to [yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com](mailto:yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com).



Ornate Box Turtle, *Terrapene ornata*, by Mary Kay Baum.

### Ask the Experts!

Do you have questions about turtle biology or turtle conservation issues, but you can't quite seem to find the answers? Submit your turtle questions via email ([yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com](mailto:yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com)) to our panel of experts, and we will select questions to answer in our upcoming newsletter editions. Please include your name and location in your email message

### Are You an Educator or Interpretive Naturalist?

We continue to work to develop a collection of Year of the Turtle resources for teachers and naturalists to use for turtle education. If you are willing to share, please send your unit materials, educational program information, websites, or PowerPoint presentations to [yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com](mailto:yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com). Please include your name, the name of your school/nature center or organization, and location. If you did not create the materials, please be sure to tell us where you found the materials.

## May's Featured Citizen Science Programs

Get involved in a citizen science (volunteer) program in your neighborhood, community, or elsewhere!

Citizen science places volunteers of all backgrounds and ages in partnerships with organizations and scientists to collect important biological data. There are many great programs focused on turtles available to the public. This month we highlight several citizen science programs from the US with which you can become involved. A full list of US and international programs can be found at [www.yearoftheturtle.org](http://www.yearoftheturtle.org). We thank everyone who has contributed information on their citizen science programs to the Year of the Turtle thus far. Are you involved with a turtle citizen program or have information on a specific project that you would like to share? Please send information on your citizen science programs to [yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com](mailto:yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com) and make sure your project helps us get more citizens involved in turtle science!

### Linking Landscapes for Massachusetts Wildlife

The Linking Landscapes mission is “to minimize the impact of the existing road network on rare and nongame wildlife, while improving highway safety, through cost-effective research, planning, and implementation of partnerships with citizens and communities of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.” This initiative results from collaboration between the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, the Massachusetts National Heritage and Endangered Species Program, University of Massachusetts, and the Vernal Pool Association. The group monitors

turtle and other wildlife “roadkill” throughout the state and even has a specific initiative focused on native turtles. The study hopes to identify turtle road-crossing “hotspots” and prioritize sites that should have transportation infrastructure improvements. Connecting natural landscapes is the overall goal of the group.

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<http://www.linkinglandscapes.info>



Western Pond Turtle, by Sara Schuster

### The Presence, Absence Monitoring Project

This project was initiated to monitor the populations of Western Pond Turtles (*Actinemys marmorata*). This project was set up by the researchers of the Chelonian Science Foundation to collect long-term data about the species' population stability and trends, as well as stressors and the success of reintroduction efforts. Private land owners, land preserves/conservancies, watershed management/restoration

organizations, environmental consultants, government agencies and public volunteers that live in the Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties of California are all encouraged to participate and contribute data. The volunteers' data are vital to the monitoring of the populations of this species – California's only native freshwater turtle.

#### Contact Information:

Stephanie Pappas  
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PO Box 3432  
Ventura, California 93004  
E-mail: [csf@att.net](mailto:csf@att.net)

[http://westernpondturtle.org/Presence\\_Absence\\_Project.html](http://westernpondturtle.org/Presence_Absence_Project.html)

### Share the Beach

Share the Beach is a partnership in Alabama among the Alabama Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau, Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, ADCNR State Lands, Coastal Section, and NOAA. This organization educates the public on sea turtles and their conservation and recruits volunteers to aid in sea turtle conservation efforts. Citizen scientists patrol assigned stretches of beach, observe and protect nests when hatching time is near, and perform maintenance. Annual statistics on turtle nesting activity are compiled using volunteer observations.

#### Contact Information:

Phone: 1-866-SEA-TURTLE  
Fax: 251-948-3813

<http://www.alabamaseaturtles.com/>



# An Interview with Whit Gibbons

By Judy Greene, Savannah River Ecology Laboratory



Whit Gibbons and friend. Photo by Judy Greene.

Dr. J. Whitfield Gibbons, professor emeritus from the University of Georgia's Savannah River Ecology Laboratory, has authored and co-authored 21 books (and more than 1000 articles for journals, newspapers and the popular press) on subjects relating to ecology and herpetology. Two of his books feature turtles specifically and exclusively: *Turtles; the Animal Answer Guide* (Johns Hopkins Press, 2009, co-authored with Judy Greene) and *Turtles of the Southeast*, (UGA Press 2008, co-authored with Kurt Buhlmann and Tracey Tuberville). Whit (as he prefers to be called) became interested in turtles in 1953 when he was invited to participate in a Tulane University field trip to search for turtles on southern rivers with Don Tinkle, who was a graduate student at the time. This opportunity sparked his career in herpetology, and an interest in these sturdy reptiles that continues today.

Northern Diamondback Terrapin,  
photo by Kevin Plitt

*What, in your opinion, is the biggest conservation issue facing turtles today?*

Humans and their activities and cultural attitudes will make or break the future of many, perhaps all, species of turtles. If a resource is not valued and appreciated, it won't be protected and maintained. The problems facing turtles, and we all know them, are all caused by people directly or indirectly, and by too many people, so humans alone hold the key to their collective futures.

*Do you have a favorite species of turtle?*

In a newspaper article I wrote in 2003 I stated, "Diamondback Terrapins are my favorite turtle. Imagine a reptile with the dreamy eyes of a golden retriever and the unassuming face of a manatee. Add the docile temperament of a lamb and the beauty of the prettiest seashell. For extra credit include perseverance against natural hazards of coastal weather, a sea full of predators, and a century of human-caused adversity. This tough, attractive little turtle has a record for getting through rough times with no complaints." My sentiments have not changed. An added bonus to working with terrapins is that it has afforded me the opportunity to expend time and



effort in the beautiful coastal habitats of the Southeastern United States.

*Do you have any particular advice during the Year of the Turtle?*

This may be a little controversial, but I think that it is a mistake that people have been discouraged from taking turtles they encounter home for observation for a few days. The hazards to the humans or animals involved in this activity have been way overstated. People, and children in particular, are fascinated by animals that they meet personally. Pictures in books and Discovery Channel shows are educational and important, but can't compete with the real thing. I am not recommending that people break any laws, but having a turtle "up close and personal" is the best way I know of to foster appreciation of these wonderful beasts.

*What guidance on turtle conservation do you have for policy makers, landowners, and politicians?*

Lovers of turtles have to remain optimistic, forward thinking, and proactive in times when there is not a lot of good news. It's too easy to get caught up in the negative and to think all is lost. PARC is doing a great job of engaging people about conservation issues, and turtles are benefitting. For example one local success story for turtles happened in May 2009 when concerned citizens, including many members of PARC, were able to get a law passed in South Carolina that prevents commercial exploitation of our native turtles (which were being targeted for the food markets of Asia).

*\*The views and opinions of interviewees are not necessarily shared by all members of PARC or other Year of the Turtle Partners*

## PARC Regional Working Group Spotlight: Get Involved in Turtle Conservation in Arizona with SWPARC and the Arizona Game and Fish Department



*Ornate box turtle (Terrapene ornata luteola) in southeastern Arizona. Photo by George Andrejko.*

When most people think of Arizona, turtles generally don't come to mind. However, Arizona has six species of native turtles (Arizona, Sonora, and Yellow Mud turtles; Painted Turtle, Ornate Box Turtle, and Desert Tortoise). Arizona's turtles share many of the same threats faced by all North American chelonians, including the introduction of nonnative species and habitat loss and degradation from urbanization. The Arizona Game and Fish Department's Turtles Project manages turtles statewide through population monitoring, provision of grants, and coordination with state, federal, and private agencies. Citizen scientists also take an active role in our efforts: Here are a few of the many ways to get involved in conserving Arizona's turtle populations.

### REPORT BOX TURTLE ENCOUNTERS

The Ornate Box Turtle Watch Program asks the public to report observations of wild box turtles in southeastern Arizona. Arizona's Ornate Box Turtle populations, like other North American box turtle populations, appear to be in decline, but

little is known of the reasons because this burrowing species is elusive. Participants collect data such as habitat and land use from box turtle localities, which will allow us to determine where the species is still abundant and provide insight into the cause for their decline. For more information, visit the Ornate Box Turtle Watch website at [www.azgfd.gov/boxturtlewatch](http://www.azgfd.gov/boxturtlewatch).



*Male ornate box turtle (Terrapene ornata luteola). Photo by George Andrejko.*

### KEEP CAPTIVE TURTLES CAPTIVE

Another serious issue threatening Arizona's turtles is the release or escape of captive turtles. Pet aquatic turtles are often dumped into urban water bodies when their owners can no longer care for them. With the help of hundreds of volunteers, we hold an annual nonnative turtle trapping at an urban Phoenix pond. We have trapped almost 600 turtles representing 15 species (only one native) during five years. The males are marked and returned to the pond. The females, and any restricted or injurious species (such as snapping and softshell turtles), are removed and placed with the Phoenix Herpetological Society in an effort to reduce breeding and slow their spread into native waters. In addition, through volunteers we



*Sixty-two-pound alligator snapping turtle (Macrochelys temminickii) captured in 2010 during nonnative turtle trapping event in Phoenix. Photo by George Andrejko.*

inform the public on the importance of responsible pet ownership and the threat from nonnative species to native wildlife. If you have a pet turtle you can no longer care for, place it with a reptile rescue organization instead of releasing it.



*Audrey Owens showing a young volunteer how to weigh a turtle captured during nonnative turtle trapping event in Phoenix. Photo by Cristina Jones.*

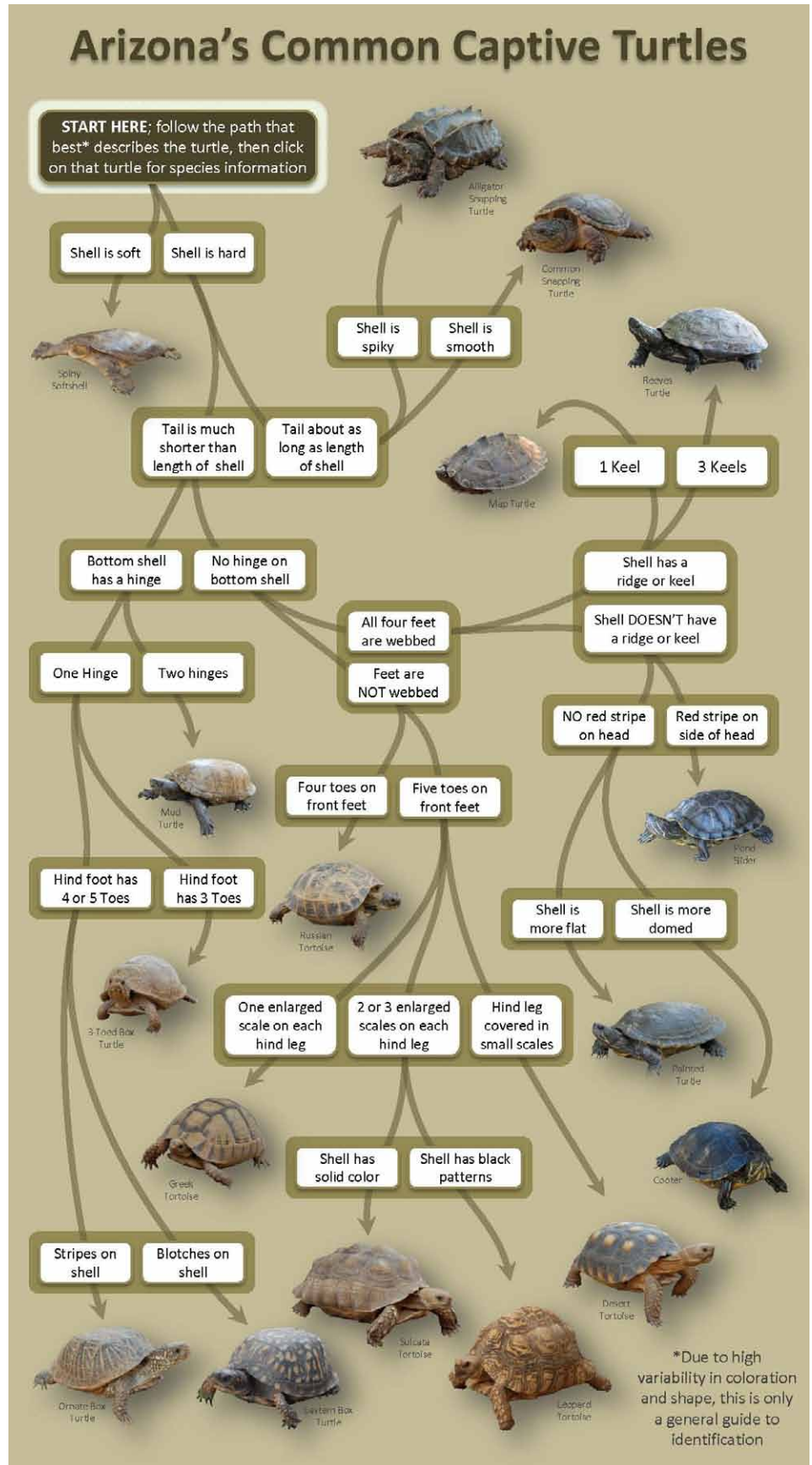


Cristina Jones with a 100 lb African Spurred Tortoise (*Geochelone sulcata*) found living in the Superstition Wilderness, Pinal County, Arizona. Photo by Andy Bridges.

**LEARN TO IDENTIFY TURTLES**

With the popularity of turtles in captivity, including the desert tortoise, escaped captive chelonians (native and nonnative) are increasingly being found outside their enclosures, wandering neighborhoods and sometimes even natural desert areas. People who find a turtle often want to know what it is and whom to call, so we created an online identification guide to Arizona's commonly kept captive turtles. We hope this website will raise awareness that many turtles encountered in Arizona do not belong here. To view the identification guide, visit [www.azgfd.gov/turtleID](http://www.azgfd.gov/turtleID).

The Arizona Game and Fish Department has been actively involved with national PARC efforts as well as the SWPARC Regional Working Group since PARC's inception. For more information on opportunities to help, visit the Arizona Game and Fish Department's Turtles Project website at [www.azgfd.gov/turtle](http://www.azgfd.gov/turtle).



## Upcoming Meetings and Events

**Heckscher Spring Festival.** April 30-May 1, Long Island, New York.

**River Park North/Walter L. Stasavich Science & Nature Center** “North Carolina Turtles in Peril”

**Program,** with Guest Speaker Jeff Hall, PARC Biologist, May 5, Greenville, North Carolina.

**Terrific Turtles program,** May 21, MassAudubon’s Laughing Brook Wildlife Sanctuary and the Town of Hampden, Hampden, Massachusetts.

**World Turtle Day.** May 23.

**Second Mediterranean Congress of Herpetology,** May 23-27, Morocco.

**Turtle Release and Celebration,** May 27, Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife release of head-started Northern Red-bellied Cooters at Burrage Pond Wildlife Management Area, Hanson, Massachusetts.

**Traveling Turtles program** on seasonal breeding migration, June 11, South Shore Natural Science Center, Norwell, Massachusetts.

**Turtle Time** at MassAudubon’s Ipswich River Sanctuary, June 12, Topsfield, Massachusetts.

**Turtles of the Outer Cape Field School,** June 22-25, MassAudubon’s Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, Wellfleet, Massachusetts.

“**Year of the Turtle Day**”, Connecticut Dept. of Environmental Protection and Friends of Sessions Woods, June 26, Burlington, Connecticut.

**Joint Meeting of Society of Wetland Scientists, Wetpol, and Wetlands Biogeochemistry,** July 3-8, Prague, Czech Republic.

**Joint Meeting of the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists League, and Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles,** July 6-11, Minneapolis, Minnesota. Includes the **Biology of Turtles of the Upper Mississippi River Basin Symposium,** July 10-11.

**Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies - Summer Meeting,** July 15-21, Big Sky, Montana.

**Turtles and Snakes program,** July 16, Trustees of Reservations naturalist Rene Wendell, Sheffield, Massachusetts.

**American Museum of Natural History’s Southwestern Research Station course on field herpetology,** July 24 - August 3, Portal, Arizona.

**Ecological Society of America 96th Annual Meeting,** August 7-12, Austin, Texas.

**SW PARC Annual Meeting,** August 10-11, Tucson, AZ

**9th Annual Symposium on the Conservation and Biology of Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles.** Co-hosted by the Turtle Survival Alliance and the IUCN Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group. August 14-17, Orlando, Florida.

**Current Research in Sonoran Desert Herpetology V Symposium,** August 15-16, Tucson, Arizona.

**Northeast PARC Annual Meeting,** August 16-17, Millersville, Maryland.

**Society for Ecological Restoration International World Conference.** August 21-25, Merida, Mexico.

**The Wildlife Society, Central Mountains and Plains Section Meeting.** August 23-25, Gering, Nebraska.

### Subscribe Now!

Don’t miss the upcoming editions of the Year of the Turtle News! If you have not already, subscribe to the monthly electronic newsletter by submitting an email with the subject “subscribe” to [yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com](mailto:yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com).

### TSA Announces a Call for Papers for 9th Annual Symposium

The Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA) has announced a call for papers for the **9th Annual Symposium on the Conservation and Biology of Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles.** The Symposium, held jointly with the IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group, will be held August 14–17, 2011 in Orlando, Florida. For abstract submission guidelines and further information on the Symposium, including how to register, visit [www.turtlesurvival.org/get-involved/2011-conference](http://www.turtlesurvival.org/get-involved/2011-conference).

