



Turtles

of Monmouth County



Painted Turtle

www.MonmouthCountyParks.com

Introduction

Turtles are reptiles--kin to snakes, lizards, alligators, and crocodiles. However, they carry part of their skeleton on the outside of their bodies, which makes them unique from most other animals. Plus, with a lifespan of up to 80 years for some local species, they are very special indeed!



There are a variety of popular turtle programs offered by Park System Naturalists--here a baby Painted Turtle is displayed.

As with other reptiles, turtles are ectothermic (also known as "cold-blooded"), which means they use their surroundings to regulate body temperature. To cool off, they burrow in the mud or hide under vegetation.



Spend some time in the parks, especially near the water, and you will have to try hard NOT to see Painted Turtles.

To warm up, they bask in the sun. In winter, all reptiles in our area must hibernate to survive the cold.

Threats to Turtles

Road mortality is a threat to many local species. This threat occurs most often when the females are moving to and from their breeding sites. Other threats include habitat loss, habitat fragmentation (when breeding sites are separated from feeding sites, for example) and illegal collection. In the case of the threatened Wood Turtle and endangered

Bog Turtle, continued habitat destruction and collection could cause a local extinction (extirpation).

Many people think it is OK to bring a found turtle home as a pet. The best policy is to admire turtles from a distance and leave them alone to enjoy their own natural habitat. Turtles remain much healthier if left in the wild.

Wood Turtle



Bog Turtle



The Monmouth County Park System has two environmental centers dedicated to nature education. Each has a trained staff of naturalists to answer visitor questions and a variety of displays, exhibits, and hands-on activities where visitors of all ages can learn about area wildlife and natural history.

The **Huber Woods Environmental Center**, on Brown's Dock Road in Middletown, features exhibits about birds, plants, wildlife and the Lenape Indians. Make sure to visit the colorful Reptile House, where a variety of snakes, turtles and frogs are on display. Miles of surrounding trails offer many opportunities to enjoy and view nature.



The **Manasquan Reservoir Environmental Center**, on Georgia Tavern Road in Howell specializes in wetland species. The center has many water-related displays and exhibits to learn about local plants and wildlife. The 5-mile perimeter trail is a great place to explore and enjoy nature.



Common Turtles of Monmouth County

Eastern Box Turtle (*Special Concern*)

Common Snapping Turtle

Eastern Painted Turtle

Red Bellied Turtle

Bog Turtle (*Endangered*)

Spotted Turtle (*Special Concern*)

Musk Turtle

Eastern Mud Turtle

Northern Diamondback Terrapin
(*Special Concern*)

Wood Turtle (*Threatened*)

Spotted Turtle



Spotted Turtles are a species of Special Concern because, although threats exist, they have not yet been placed on the Endangered/Threatened List.

Occasionally, turtles that are not native to this area are found in Monmouth County. This usually happens when they are brought into the area as pets and released by their owners. This is a bad practice because it puts non-native turtles into competition with native turtles. Some non-native turtles that have been found here include the Eastern Spiny Softshell and the Red-eared Slider.

Land Turtles

There is really only one land turtle commonly found in Monmouth County, and that is the Eastern Box Turtle. It is the only turtle in the area that can close its shell like a box, hence its name. The color of its fully grown, 6 inch shell varies from black to brown with markings that range from yellow to red-orange. This turtle eats mostly worms, slugs, and insects, but will also eat fruits, vegetables, and mushrooms to supplement its meat diet.

Eastern Box Turtle



Water Turtles

There are many water turtles native to Monmouth County. The one you are most likely to see is the Eastern Painted Turtle. It has a black shell edged in red and yellow, and can grow to a length of 6 inches. Painted turtles are often seen resting on logs in ponds and lakes. Even from a distance, the glint of the sun off of its polished-looking shell gives its presence away. Snails, insects, and fish are included in its diet. The larger but similar looking Red-bellied Turtle is also frequently sighted in our waterways, especially in larger and deeper lakes.



Two Red-Bellied Turtles climb on a log.

Diamondback Terrapin



The Diamondback Terrapin is an inhabitant of saltwater marshes.

The Snapping Turtle is another common pond inhabitant. Its shell can grow to 18 1/2 inches and the turtle can weigh up to 35 pounds, making it the largest local turtle. Triangular points at the back end of its shell and extremely long "dragon-like" tail make it easy to identify. Fish, frogs, tadpoles, and most small animals within its reach become a meal, including small ducks, mice, and even small turtles!

Snapping Turtle



This large Snapping Turtle draws its head in.



The dragon-like tail of the Snapping Turtle.

Other local water turtles- the Bog, Spotted, Musk, and Eastern Mud--are much more secretive, and you are less likely to see them.

Further Reading: Schwartz, Vicki, and Golden, David M. 2002. *Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of New Jersey*. New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife