



Virginia Herpetological Society Newsletter

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Important, please note...new format for newsletter!

It has been decided to shift to an electronic format for the VHS newsletter. For those who prefer or do not have access to e-mail, a limited number of hard copies will be distributed. **To begin this process, we will need an e-mail address for all current members. Please send this information to Paul Sattler at psattler@liberty.edu**

Summary of Sea Turtle Strandings in Virginia during 2001

Erin E. Seney, Department of Fisheries Science, Virginia Institute of Marine Science, The College of William and Mary, PO Box 1346, Gloucester Point, VA 23062

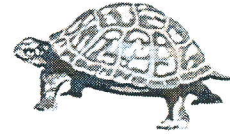
Ruth Boettcher, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, PO Box 476, Painter, VA 23420

Five of the seven extant species of sea turtles occur in Virginia's coastal waters, and all are listed as threatened or endangered. They include loggerheads (*Caretta caretta*), green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*), Kemp's ridleys (*Lepidochelys kempfi*), leatherbacks (*Dermochelys coriacea*) and an infrequent hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*). In most years, between 200 and 300 sea turtles are found stranded on Virginia's coastal beaches and in state waters. A stranding is defined as a dead or live debilitated sea turtle found on or near shore whose death or debilitation cannot be directly attributed to an interaction with a fishery, dredging operation, or any other lawfully conducted human activity.

During 2001, 395 sea turtle strandings were confirmed and recorded by the Virginia Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network

(VSTSSN), which is administered by the Virginia Institute of Marine Science Sea Turtle Program. This total represents the highest annual number of reported strandings in VSTSSN's 23-year history.

Ninety-one percent of these strandings occurred between May and September, with 55% of the year's total observed during the month of June alone. Nearly half (45%) of the strandings were found in the Chesapeake Bay (Bay) along Virginia's Eastern Shore. The remaining 55% were evenly distributed among Virginia's four other stranding regions. These areas are the western shores of the Bay and associated river systems, the southern shores of the Bay, the ocean-side of the Eastern Shore and its barrier island chain, and the ocean-facing beaches from Fort Story to the North Carolina border. Strandings in 2001 were comprised of 332 loggerheads, 41 Kemp's ridleys, seven leatherbacks, 3 green turtles and 13 unidentified species. Advanced decomposition of stranded turtles often hinders the determination of cause of death, but a minimum of 34 sea turtle deaths may have been the result of boat strikes last year. The cause of death for most of the remaining animals could not be determined, although several animals had ingested fishing hooks and/or were entangled in some type of fishing gear.

**COME PARTICIPATE IN THE SPRING 2002 MEETING OF
THE VIRGINIA HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

This year we will be surveying The Big Survey Wildlife Management Area in Wythe County. The Big Survey Wildlife Management Area is 8,300 acres of forested land in Virginia's southwestern mountains recently acquired by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. The property contains mixed pine and hardwood forests and includes Stuart Mountain, Lick Mountain, Sand Mountain and Swecker Mountain. Wythe County is located in both the Blue Ridge and the Ridge and Valley physiographic provinces.

Schedule:

Friday May 17

7:00 PM	Business meeting (Wytheville County Library)
7:45 PM	Break
8:00 PM	Slide show of potential species
8:30 PM	Guest speaker

Saturday May 18

8:00 AM	Meet at Big Survey Wildlife Management Area
8:30 AM	Break into survey groups and travel to designated survey locations
12:30 PM	Free to survey outside of initial survey locations
5:30 PM	Meet back at Big Survey Wildlife Management Area to compile survey reports and photo collected specimens

Sunday May 19

8:00 AM	Meet at Big Survey Wildlife Management Area and select other locations in Wythe County to survey
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Accommodations:

There are numerous motels and hotels located in the town of Wytheville. The following website has a complete listing of places to stay: <http://chamber.wytheville.com/>, or contact Shelly Miller for Wythe County Visitors Guide at 804-367-0909 or smiller@dgif.state.va.us

Camping:

Wytheville KOA, RT.2, Box 122, Wytheville, VA 24382 – Ph (540) 228-2601
Deer Trail Park, Wythe, Ph (540) 228-3636

Directions to Wytheville County Library:

Take I 81 west to the city of Wytheville. Exit U.S. route 11 south. Turn right onto N 11th St. and the left onto Monroe St. The library is located at 300 Monroe St. The library's phone number is (276) 228-4951

For more information, maps, and updates please visit the VHS website.

http://fwie.fw.vt.edu/VHS/2002_spring_survey.htm

Potential Species List (Compiled by John White)**Known Herps of Wythe County, VA**

<i>(Ambystoma maculatum)</i>	Spotted salamander
<i>(Aneides aeneus)</i>	Green salamander
<i>(Bufo americanus)</i>	American toad
<i>(Carphophis amoenus amoenus)</i>	Eastern worm snake
<i>(Chrysemys picta picta)</i>	Eastern painted turtle
<i>(Coluber constrictor constrictor)</i>	Northern black racer
<i>(Desmognathus fuscus)</i>	Northern dusky salamander
<i>(Desmognathus monticola)</i>	Seal salamander
<i>(Desmognathus ochrophaeus)</i>	Allegheny mountain dusky salamander
<i>(Desmognathus orestes)</i>	Blue Ridge dusky salamander
<i>(Desmognathus quadramaculatus)</i>	Black-bellied salamander
<i>(Diadophis punctatus edwardsii)</i>	Northern ringneck snake
<i>(Elaphe obsoleta obsoleta)</i>	Black rat snake
<i>(Eurycea cirrigera)</i>	Southern two-lined salamander (<i>Eurycea longicauda</i>)
<i>longicauda)</i>	Longtail salamander
<i>(Gyrinophilus porphyriticus porphyriticus)</i>	Northern spring salamander
<i>(Hemidactylium scutatum)</i>	Four-toed salamander
<i>(Lampropeltis triangulum triangulum)</i>	Eastern milk snake
<i>(Nerodia sipedon sipedon)</i>	Northern water snake
<i>(Opheodrys aestivus aestivus)</i>	Rough green snake
<i>(Plethodon cinereus)</i>	Northern red-backed salamander
<i>(Plethodon cylindraceus)</i>	White-spotted slimy salamander
<i>(Plethodon glutinosus)</i>	Northern slimy salamander
<i>(Plethodon richmondi)</i>	Ravine salamander
<i>(Plethodon yonahlossee)</i>	Yonahlossee salamander
<i>(Pseudacris brachyphona)</i>	Mountain chorus frog
<i>(Pseudotriton montanus diastictus)</i>	Midland mud salamander
<i>(Pseudotriton ruber ruber)</i>	Northern red salamander
<i>(Rana catesbeiana)</i>	Bullfrog
<i>(Rana clamitans melanota)</i>	Southern green frog
<i>(Rana palustris)</i>	Pickerel frog
<i>(Sceloporus undulatus hyacinthinus)</i>	Northern fence lizard
<i>(Sternotherus odoratus)</i>	Eastern musk turtle
<i>(Terrapene carolina carolina)</i>	Eastern box turtle

Herps may be found in Wythe Co.

<i>(Agkistrodon contortrix mokasen)</i>	Northern copperhead
<i>(Bufo fowleri)</i>	Fowler's toad
<i>(Chelydra serpentina serpentina)</i>	Eastern snapping turtle
<i>(Eurycea lucifuga)</i>	Cave salamander
<i>(Heterodon platirhinos)</i>	Eastern hognose snake
<i>(Notophthalmus viridescens viridescens)</i>	Red-spotted newt
<i>(Pseudacris crucifer crucifer)</i>	Northern spring peeper
<i>(Rana sylvatica)</i>	Wood frog
<i>(Regina septemvittata septemvittata)</i>	Queen snake
<i>(Thamnophis sirtalis sirtalis)</i>	Common garter snake
<i>(Pseudacris feriarum)</i>	Upland chorus frog
<i>(Apalone spinifera spinifera)</i>	Eastern spiny softshell turtle
<i>(Crotalus horridus horridus)</i>	Timber rattlesnake
<i>(Cryptobranchus alleganiensis a.</i>	Hellbender
<i>(Desmognathus welteri)</i>	Black mountain salamander
<i>(Eumeces fasciatus)</i>	Five-lined skink
<i>(Pituophis melanoleucus melanoleucus)</i>	Northern pinesnake
<i>(Plethodon jordani)</i>	Jordan's salamander
<i>(Plethodon wehrlei)</i>	Wehrle's salamander

HERP HAPPENINGS

Early Announcement: VHS Ambystomid Symposium, Fall 2002

The VHS officers and some members are already hard at work preparing for a symposium on mole salamanders for the fall meeting in 2002. Virginia has six species of mole salamanders including Jefferson Salamander, Mabee's salamander, spotted salamander, marbled salamander, mole salamander, and eastern tiger salamander. The goal of this symposium is to bring together people conducting research on these animals to discuss current research, observations, sampling techniques, and status of these creatures in Virginia. The date for this symposium has been set for October 12, 2002. It will be held at Holiday Lake 4-H Educational Center Appomattox, Virginia. Anyone interested in giving a presentation is welcome. Please contact Jason Gibson (434) 724-9034 or frogman31@earthlink.net as soon as possible. A photo contest will be held with a mole salamander theme.

2001 VHS Fall Meeting and Symposium

The VHS held a successful fall meeting at Northern Virginia Community College, Annandale Campus. The morning got started with a teacher workshop led by Kathy Quindlen, Mike Pinder, John White, George Zug, and Jason Gibson. During the business meeting, John White was elected vice president, and Paul Sattler was re-elected secretary. Bob Greenlee was recognized for his contributions and service as VHS president (1999-2001). A hearty thanks to all of them for their past and future service!

Other items discussed during the business meeting included a possible fall symposium on mole salamanders, spring survey sites, and the possibility of sending the newsletter via e-mail. Special thanks go to Walt Bulmer, an instructor at NVCC and VHS member, for organizing facilities and parking. Look for minutes of the meeting in the next *Catesbeiana*.

The paper session had four speakers and an audience of approximately 31 people. Dr. George Zug led the presenters with a presentation entitled "Can bones tell time?".

Tom Akre, a student at George Mason University, presented a very informative talk entitled "Wood turtles in Virginia; the conservation biology of a threatened species." Tom Wilson, another student at George Mason University presented "The Status and Conservation of *Clemmys guttata*." Todd Georgel finished the presentations with the talk, "Seasonal activity and predator-prey size relationships in carpenter frogs (*Rana virgatipes*) in Virginia." The presentations were excellent, and the VHS thanks everyone who participated.

Earth Day Celebration

The VHS has been invited to set up a booth on reptiles and amphibians and about our organization at an Earth Day Festival to be held at Newport News Park on April 20, 2002. Other environmental agencies and organizations will also have displays set up. The park is expecting a couple of thousand people to show up. This is a great opportunity for the VHS to educate people about reptiles and amphibians. If anyone is interested in staffing the booth or contributing in some way, please contact Jason Gibson (frogman31@earthlink.net) or John White (reptiles@erols.com).

Interested in participating in herp surveys?

Jeff Cooper, a nongame biologist with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF), is looking for volunteers with herp experience to lend a hand with baseline surveys of the VDGIF Wildlife Management Areas in northern Virginia. This year the focus will be on G.R. Thompson and Rapidan Wildlife Management Areas. Rapidan WMA is located approximately 25 miles west of Culpeper and 30 miles north of Charlottesville. Some of the tracts are adjacent to Shenandoah National Park. G.R. Thompson WMA is located north of I-66 at Markham. If you are interested, please contact Jeff at (540) 899-4169 or through e-mail jcooper@dgif.state.va.us

Celebrate Biodiversity!

Submitted by Susan Watson, VDGIF

May 2002 has been named the first American Biodiversity Month by an initiative known as the International Biodiversity Observation Year (IBOY). American Biodiversity Month is intended to be a national celebration of America's rich diversity of life marked by educational activities and scientific exploration. To celebrate, several biologists and naturalists from the Richmond area are planning to conduct a BioBlitz and are seeking other experts to participate. Guidelines have been set up by IBOY. According to these guidelines, BioBlitz is an intensive, 24-hour, biological survey of a site, using as many experts of as many taxons as possible with the goal of identifying as many species as they can count in this limited time. It also involves public education by incorporating media coverage of the event and on-site outreach activities during the event.

Dr. Arthur Evans, Research Associate (entomology) with the Smithsonian Institution and Virginia Museum of Natural History, is spearheading one Richmond-area effort and is the team leader on insects. The Richmond group has decided to conduct the Bioblitz at Pocahontas State Park, in Chesterfield County. The information collected during the BioBlitz will be used in species' databases housed at the Division of Natural Heritage, (Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation), and at the Fish and Wildlife Information Services Section of the Wildlife Diversity Division, (Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries). The Bioblitz is planned to begin at noon on Saturday, May 11 and end at noon on Sunday, May 12. Contact Joe Mitchell for more info (jmitchel@richmond.edu or 804-740-7086)

For more Information about IBOY and organizing your own BioBlitz or other biodiversity event, visit the following website <http://www.nrel.colostate.edu/IBOY/>

Other upcoming meetings:

American Society of Ichthyology and Herpetology, July 3-8, 2002; Kansas City, MO

11th International Conference on Aquatic Invasive Species

February 26-1, 2002: Alexandria, VA

For more information, visit

<http://www.aquatic-invasive-species-conference.org> or e-mail profedge@renc.igs.net.

7th International Wildlife Law Conference

March 30, 2002: Washington, DC

For more information, visit <http://eelink.net/~asilwildlife/programs2.shtml>.

In the news...**Hofstra University research explores nesting ecology of diamondback terrapins (*Malaclemys terrapin*)**

J.A. Feinberg authored a masters thesis entitled "Nesting ecology of diamondback terrapins (*Malaclemys terrapin*) at Gateway National Recreation Area". The nesting ecology of diamondback terrapins (*Malaclemys terrapin*) was studied in 1998 and 1999 at Gateway National Recreation Area. Populations of nesting terrapins were found at three different locations. Female terrapins nested from early June through late July, and laid up to two clutches per season, depositing an average of 10.9 eggs per nest.

Nesting activity increased with daily high temperature and high tide. The majority of females were captured when there was 25-75% cloud cover. The majority of nests were counted in shrub-land, mixed-grassland, and dune habitats, but nest density was highest on a man-made, sandy trail and on beaches. Raccoons depredated 92.2% of terrapin nests. Only 5.2% of terrapin nests survived to produce hatchlings. A total of 1,319 and 1,840 depredated nests in 1998 and 1999, respectively, were counted at the Jamaica Bay National Wildlife Refuge. The carcasses of 23 female terrapins were found that had apparently been killed by raccoons as the terrapins came on land to nest. For more information please contact: Jeremy A.

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JERFEIN@AOL.COM

South Carolina wants to curtail spotted turtle trade

Adapted from an article published in *The State*, Nov. 17, 2001

The S.C. Department of Natural Resources wants to take the unusual step of placing the spotted turtle on the threatened species list, then allowing people to capture them as pets.

Spotted turtles, *Clemmys guttata*, are attractive turtles with yellow spots on their shells. They can be found in bogs and swamps on the entire Atlantic seaboard and around the Great Lakes. The turtles are protected by law in 17 of the 22 states where they are found, including most in the Southeast.

Tom Kohlstat, section chief for wildlife diversity at the agency, said the staff proposed a regulation that wouldn't slam the door on taking the turtles but would make it impossible to harvest them for sale. The violation is a misdemeanor with punishment of up to a \$500 fine and up to six months in jail.

The regulations allow a resident to get permits to capture up to nine spotted turtles from the wild for their personal use. They couldn't sell those but could sell their captive bred offspring. The agency will use the permitting process to keep track of which turtles are wild or captive born.

At the request of a handful of turtle enthusiasts, the agency included a grandfather clause that allows anyone who already had more than nine turtles to keep them. They must register their turtles within a year of the regulations taking effect. The changes next will be considered by the state Legislature, which can approve them, vote them down or take no action and allow them to go into effect.

Bush Administration Rolls Back Clinton Rules for Wetlands

Adapted from an article in *The New York Times*, Jan. 15, 2002

The Bush administration announced that it would ease some Clinton administration regulations covering wetlands and streams, saying the changes would reduce unnecessary paperwork.

John Studt, chief of the regulatory branch of the Army Corps of Engineers, said the revisions "will do a better job of protecting aquatic ecosystems

while simplifying some administrative burdens for the regulated public."

The steps outlined today by the Army Corps angered environmental advocates, who accused the administration of capitulating to the interests of developers and miners and jeopardizing ecologically sensitive areas. The new rules would streamline the approval of certain development projects by giving more of them a green light under a general nationwide permit. That permit authorizes a developer to proceed — and avoid levels of scrutiny by the public and federal agencies responsible for resource management — if the project is said to have minimal impact on the environment.

Scott McClellan, a White House spokesman, said the Army Corps, which is completing a five-year updating of its permit criteria, continues to embrace a policy that requires developers to replace or set aside wetlands to offset their projects. The policy that there should be "no net loss" of wetlands was enunciated in 1989 by President George Bush and has been embraced by his son.

Under the changes announced recently, developers will not be required to provide a one-for-one replacement for the acreage affected by individual wetlands projects, as long as that goal is met in the broader region.

In March 2000, the Clinton administration increased restrictions under the general permit program affecting wetlands, limiting the amount of stream bed that may be disrupted without closer review and demanding closer scrutiny of activities in flood plains.

Those revisions are rolled back under the new approach. The Army Corps makes a new distinction between perennial and intermittent streams and relaxes rules on filling streams that do not flow year-round. It eliminates some restrictions on flood-plain development and gives local officials greater authority to approve surface mining projects.

Julie Sibbing, the wetlands lobbyist for the National Wildlife Federation, said the Army Corps had forsaken the goal of achieving no net loss of wetlands.

"This arrogant move demonstrates the Corps' complete lack of respect for our country's natural resources and is another example of how this administration is turning its back on protecting our nation's wetlands," Ms. Sibbing said.

Virginia Native

Marbled salamander (*Ambystoma opacum*)

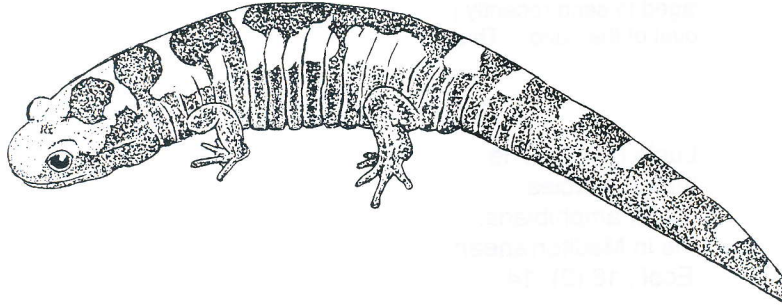


Illustration by Mike Pinder

Status and Threats:

The greatest threat to the continued success of this species is loss of bottomland hardwood and vernal pond habitats. Across the United States, thousands of local populations have been eliminated through habitat loss.

Characteristics:

The marbled salamander is a mole salamander. It has a stout, "chunky" body of medium size. It is distinguished by a black ground color with gray to white irregular crossbands. The crossbands of females tends to be gray while males' are distinctly more white in color. Adults range from 77-127 mm TL. Hatchlings are drab with bushy gills and dorsal fins. Recently transformed juveniles are typically brown or black with light flecks.

Habits and Habitat:

Typical habitats include floodplain forests with oxbows and cut-off stream channels, and upland forest with adequate breeding habitats. This species can be found in drier habitats than other ambystomid, or mole salamander, species. Mating occurs in the fall. Adults begin to migrate to breeding sites in late summer or early fall during rainy weather. Females will nest in the dried beds of temporary ponds or along pond margins. Many females stay with eggs until habitat floods. Embryos hatch shortly after the nest floods and begin feeding almost immediately. During the terrestrial phase of their lives, marbled salamanders spend most of their time under ground though they will occasionally surface during rainy weather and during the breeding season. Adults secrete large amounts of milky secretions from the tail that repel predators.

Distribution:

Ambystoma opacum occurs from southern New England to Northern Florida and westward to S. Illinois; in Virginia it is known mostly from the Coastal Plain and Piedmont, its western and southwestern range limits are uncertain.

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Literature Review

The purpose of this column is to inform members of recent herpetological research pertinent to Virginia, its fauna, or of special interest to the Society's membership. Papers or notes from professional journals, new books, "gray literature" reports, and popular magazine articles are acceptable for inclusion. Members are encouraged to send recently published items of interest to the editor. Submissions will be accepted to the approval of the editor. This is not meant to be an exhaustive bibliography.

General:

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