

**Maryland Coastal Bays Program**  
**Terrapin Survey Protocol**  
Credit: Diane Tulipani, VIMS

For each observation site, you will be looking for diamondback terrapins in the water for 3 consecutive, 15-minute intervals (total 45 minutes) where you will indicate presence/absence and if observed, counts for each 15-minute interval. Complete one data sheet for each location.

Any questions or concerns while on site, please call:

**Katherine Phillips @ 443-880-8229**

1. **Arrive at site.** If site is a public boat launch, park away from the ramp and in designated “cars only” spaces (if indicated). PLEASE, **do not interfere or interrupt** use of the boat ramp.
2. **Decide who will be observer and recorder (if more than one person).** Take a few minutes to look around the site.
  - If a sandy beach area, look about the high-water line (fairly obvious with debris piled high on the shoreline) for possible egg shells from predated nests. Shell material will be white and curled. Sometimes yolk is still visible inside the shell. Also look for terrapin tracks, 2 parallel sets of small claw marks about 8 inches apart, possibly with a “dashed line” between them which is made by the tail.
  - Write down observations on data sheet in the bottom comment area. Note water height (high or low) with respect to shoreline.
  - Take photographs of any terrapins on land or nests you may find.
  - Do one count per 15 minute observation period to avoid counting the same terrapins.
3. **Observation Periods:** 15-minute observation period

**Observer:**

Position yourself to maximize the field of view from shoreline to approximately 300 feet away from shore, or to opposite shoreline, whichever is closest. Slowly scan from shoreline out over water looking for terrapin heads. Use of binoculars or spotting scope will be helpful. **Note:** submerged or floating sticks can look like terrapin heads from a distance but they will remain in the same spot. Once all terrapins have been counted, wait until the next 15 minute observation period to count again. Repeat until three 15 minute observation periods have been completed.

**Recorder:**

Keep track of **start & end times** for each period. If no terrapins sighted, enter “0” or “none” in “Count” column. If terrapins are spotted, record the count in the “Count” column.

4. **Travel to next observation location** (if doing more than one location) and **repeat from step 1.**