

# TERRAPIN TURTLE TIDBITS



MCBP conducts an terrapin count every year in June. For more information visit our website at: [www.mdcoastalbays.org](http://www.mdcoastalbays.org)

## Diet

Diamondback terrapin consume fish, snails, worms, clams, crabs and marsh plants.

## Reproduction

**Mating Season:** May through July.

**Incubation:** Around 60 days.

**Clutch size:** 8-12 eggs.

The gender of diamondback terrapin offspring is determined by temperature – a higher nest temperature produces more females while a lower nest temperature produces more males.

The hatchlings emerge from August to October and are completely on their own. Only 1 to 3% of the eggs laid produce a hatchling, and the number of hatchlings that survive to adulthood is believed to be similarly low.

After hatching, some young remain in the nest during the winter although most emerge and enter the nearest body of water.

Hatchlings also stay among the marsh grass for protection for the first 2 years. They are too vulnerable in the water.



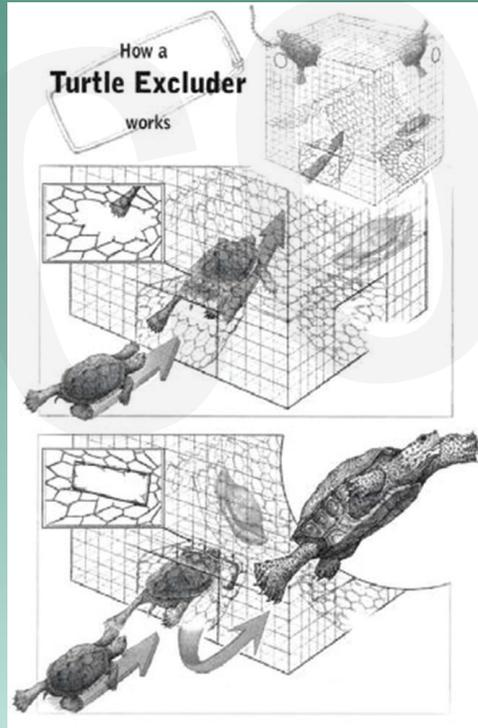
**Length:** 7.5 inches (females); 5 inches (males)

**Weight:** 1.5 lbs. (females); 0.5 lbs. (males)

**Lifespan:** 25-40 years.

## TURTLE EXCLUDERS ARE REQUIRED

These devices prevent terrapins from entering a crab pot without hindering blue crab entry. Without turtle excluders, terrapins can enter crab pots and drown. To get instructions to make your own turtle excluder visit [www.dnr.maryland.gov/fisheries/regulations/crabpot-trd/crabpot.asp](http://www.dnr.maryland.gov/fisheries/regulations/crabpot-trd/crabpot.asp)



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# Save Our State Reptile!



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## The Diamondback Terrapin

- Terrapin face numerous threats, including habitat loss, boat strikes, and nest predation.
- They are currently under consideration as a “species of concern” by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- One threat to terrapin populations, that you can easily do something about, is crab pot entrapment and drowning.

MCBP is asking recreational crabbers to take a small step that could have a big payback for our beleaguered population of diamondback terrapin.



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The diamondback terrapin is our state reptile. Inhabiting the brackish waters in the bays and creeks of the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, it is the only turtle in North America restricted to estuaries. We continue to gather life history information for this species in our area as its numbers decline in many parts of its range.

Conservation organizations, research scientists, and private individuals are researching terrapin and working to protect this natural resource. Terrapin are an important component of the coastal environment. Providing high quality food for many species, they also control numbers of periwinkle snails which, left unchecked, can damage marshes, and they clean the bay bottom by consuming dead estuarine organisms. The loss of a species like terrapin could have drastic ripple effects on marsh ecosystems.

According to research from the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Diamondback terrapin face numerous threats, including habitat loss, boat strikes, and nest predation by raccoons and other animals. But their greatest threat is drowning in crab pots. Terrapin are attracted by the same bait used to lure blue crabs to crab pots. Once the turtles get inside, most can't escape, and because they are air-breathing animals, they eventually drown. The problem is most pressing among the pots set by recreational crabbers, which typically sit in shallow waters along creeks and marshes. This is prime territory for males and juvenile female terrapins. Because of their smaller size, these terrapins are particularly vulnerable to capture and drowning. Installation of bycatch reduction devices has been shown to be an effective way to reduce this threat.

Something you can do to help terrapin is guard against crab



Terrapin Laying Eggs

©Diane Tuilpani/VIMS

pot entrapment. Terrapin enter crab pots the same way crabs do, looking for the same bait, and are then trapped the same way. Turtles breathe air, so if someone isn't checking a crab pot regularly, the terrapin can drown. Recreational pots are the most dangerous because they are set in shallow water where smaller terrapin, capable of getting caught, spend time. Installation of by-catch reduction devices will stop most terrapin from entering a crab pot, but still allow the biggest crabs through.

Waterfront property owners are legally allowed to crab with a maximum of two recreational crab pots. Maryland regulation requires each entrance be equipped with a by-catch reduction device.

## USE BRDs It's the Law...Obey the law. Catch Crabs. Save Turtles!

Help prevent unnecessary deaths of diamondback terrapin and other animals in your crab pots. Simply attach BRDs to all of your crab pots. Your participation can help preserve the diversity of animals within our coastal bays for a healthier system while still enjoying your blue crab catch.

To make your own set of 4 BRDs (1 3/4" x 4 3/4"), you will need for each crab pot:

- 11-gauge galvanized wire - 4 pieces x 14 3/4" length
- 24 hog rings (2 to form each BRD + 4 to attach BRD to pot) x4
- Marker
- Needle nose pliers
- Wire cutters (optional)



Take a single length of wire and, measuring from one end, make a mark with the marker at lengths 1 3/4", 6 1/2", 8 1/4", and 13" from the end.

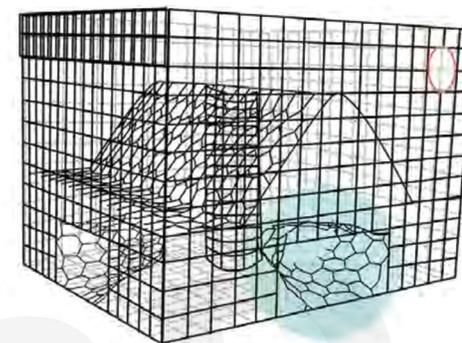
Using the pliers, bend the wire to a 90° angle upward at each mark. The first and last lengths of 1 3/4" will overlap forming a rectangle of 1 3/4" will overlap forming a rectangle of 1 3/4" x 4 3/4".

Securely close the overlapping side with 2 hog rings.

Repeat for remaining 3 lengths of wire.

**Plastic BRDs are available for purchase.**

**For more information visit**  
**[www.vims.edu/terrapiin](http://www.vims.edu/terrapiin)**



To install on the crab pot, position a BRD within each funnel opening and securely fasten to funnel with 4 cable ties per BRD; place 1 cable tie at each corner of the BRD



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