

HATCHES TERRAPIN IN BROADWAY HOTEL

Largest Shipper from Georgia
Carries His Sand Incubator
with Him.

THEY THRIVE IN HIS BATHTUB

A. M. Barbee Has Spent 23 Years
Studying Terrapin Growing and
He Tells How It Is Done.

The birthrate at the Hotel Imperial broke all records night before last. Dogs, nor cats, nor even mice had sought to do with it. The responsibility rests on terrapins, the kind you pay \$4 or \$5 for, whether you buy them whole from the dealer or by the tablespoonful in a restaurant, a price which some have fancied in one way or another was the reason why they were called "diamond backs."

The producer of the terrapins at the Imperial is A. M. Barbee, of Savannah, Ga. Born in Savannah, he is connected with the real estate business, owns a grocery store and a few other things and raises terrapin. He is about the biggest terrapin shipper in the country. He has been in the business twenty-three years, and he says he was the first twenty learning the first thing about the terrapin. Now he makes it his hobby. Every time he comes North he slips a young terrapin into his pocket, just for company's sake, and this time when he left home he not only brought along five half and full grown diamond backs, but a traveling incubator, filled with 100 terrapin eggs, and these eggs have been very busy ever since Mr. Barbee left Savannah. Mr. Barbee took out the traveling incubator to show to the conductor and porter of his Pullman, when pop! went one egg-shell and the motion was seconded by another, and before their astonished eyes

two as perfect, infant turtles as you ever saw poked their heads out and began to wiggle.

Then Mr. Barbee spent a night in Philadelphia, and the terrapinettes in forty-eight eggs, like the old monk of the limorick, broke from their shells in protest against the quiet. Now what is left of them after the number which have been given away as souvenirs are disporting in glass tanks on Mr. Barbee's bureau, together with the fifteen other little shell-backed strangers. Mr. Barbee has given over his bathtub to the bigger five he brought with him, and new terrapins greet him every time he goes back to his room. It was that way yesterday. Burrell, the room clerk, had just made a report on the hotel's vital statistics when Mr. Barbee passed by.

"Come upstairs," said the Georgian. On a chair near the bureau lay a long leather case, with an air vent in one end. It looked as if built to contain a particularly "dachsny" dachshund. The top opened, revealed a wooden box containing sand in a number of compartments. Here and there you saw a little white mound. "By George! here's another!" exclaimed Mr. Barbee, holding up a bursted shell, from which a tiny creature was trying to get away with its house on its back. In the tanks on the bureau were a multitude of wriggling things that on close examination resolved themselves into very young epiloguean entertainments.

Hatching the Terrapins.

"When I left home on Oct. 3," said Mr. Barbee, "I had eggs of the proper age to hatch out every day while away. These eggs are of the size of a pigeon's egg when first laid. As hatching time approaches, they increase in size. Here's one that will pop in a week.

"You see, terrapins are my hobby. I reckon I spend every spare minute I can get on what I call my terrapin farm. This is really a building 200 feet long by 60 feet wide. Here's a picture. You see these pans. Well, here are planks you walk on, so as to be able to see what is going on. I can flood the whole thing.

"Now, I have been twenty-three years in the terrapin business, and I had been in it the first twenty, before I started hatching terrapin eggs on my own account. You see, my biggest trouble was in collecting the eggs. A terrapin will lay almost anywhere, even in a cornfield, if the latter is near the stream where it makes its headquarters. Crows keep on the lookout for them, considering the eggs a great delicacy, and the moment mamma terrapin gets through, Jim swoops down with a part of his friends and eats up her lay. Then if the eggs escape the crows, there are the raccoons, who are great hunters, and if the turtles happen to lay too near the water, the alligators are on the watch and they get them as fast as you can count them. To find a lay of terrapin's eggs is difficult, and this is what has deterred the United

States Fish Commission from conducting terrapin hatching.

"In my pens I used to spread sand evenly over the floors, and as it was necessary to flood this before feeding the terrapin—the food is fresh fish, shrimps, fiddlers and cery—such eggs as were laid were always spoiled, as the water spoils them. It was entirely by chance that one day, instead of spreading the sand evenly, I made a pile of it. Well, Sir, the terrapins made a rush for that sand pile, and a dozen of them dug their way into it and began laying. All I had to do was to scrape away the sand and there were the eggs.

"A terrapin lays during June, July, August and early September. Each female lays from eight to ten eggs a month. I usually have about 150 dozen grown terrapins on hand, and each female can be depended upon to give me thirty eggs a season. Between the first of last July and the end of next January I shall have hatched about 7,000 eggs, and I am successful with about 95 per cent. of them.

"Of course, a terrapin egg, under proper conditions, hatches itself, but the difficulty is that the eggs of the wild terrapin are not protected, as I have pointed out. The incubator, as you see, consists of sand in a box. I keep a sort of even temperature inside, but the most I do with this one I carry with me is to keep the top sand moist and to keep the box at a proper distance from the radiator.

Opposes the Present Law.

"It would surprise you, perhaps, to be told that terrapins have a certain amount of intelligence. Mine all know me, and come when I whistle, though they will run away from a stranger.

"I have with me the first terrapin I ever hatched." Mr. Barbee opened the door of the bathroom and fished out one of the five terrapins that occupied the tub. It was about three inches long. The others were of various lengths to six inches long on the bottom. They were of various shades, depending, Mr. Barbee explained, on the color of the sand they were hatched in.

"People up North make a great mistake in the way they kill a terrapin," said Mr. Barbee. "I understand the way is usually to plunge the live terrapin in boiling water. This is not only unnecessarily cruel, but it is not the best way. You kill a chicken by chopping off its head, and letting the fowl bleed. A terrapin should be treated the same way, and I can assure you it loses none of its flavor.

"The laws says you must not have terrapin in your possession under five inches long, but I assert that what I am doing is in the interests of the conservation of the terrapin. By getting the eggs and hatching them I am certainly adding to the number of terrapin in existence, because the great proportion of these eggs would otherwise be destroyed. If the Government had the intention of go-

ing into terrapin hatching and repopulating the Chesapeake Bay and other waters with the young, I would be glad to turn over my eggs and my young to it, but if any attempt is made to make me stop bringing terrapin into the world otherwise, I will fight, as I maintain I am doing a lot more for the conservation of the terrapin than the Government is. The other day in Philadelphia a constable came to see me and told me he understood I was breaking the law by keeping undersized terrapin. I showed him my traveling live stock and he said no more."

Mr. Barbee took from his pocket a tiny pasteboard box and took off the lid, showing a tiny terrapin.

"This is Toby," he said. "Toby was born last January, and she has been living in my pocket most of the time ever since. She knows me, and you notice if I try to put the end of my finger into her mouth she pushes it away."