

Meeting Notes
Northeast Diamondback Terrapin Working Group Meeting
September 16, 2006
New England Aquarium, Boston, MA

Attendees:

Russell Burke: Facilitator, Dept. of Biology, Hofstra University
Charlotte Sornborger: Barrington Land Conservation Trust
Adena Spadaro: student, Wheaton College
Barbara Brennessel: Dept. of Biology Wheaton College
Brad MacDonald: Boston College alumnus
Allison Murphy: Boston College alumna
Pete Auger: Biology Dept. Boston College and Barnstable High School
Amie Kortis: Natural Resource Officer, Sandy Neck, Barnstable, MA
Maria Aucoin: Boston College Environmental Studies
Chuck Landrey: Turtle Conservation Project
Pilar Gibson: Biologist, New England Aquarium
Dave Taylor: former high school teacher involved with headstarting of Plymouth red bellied turtle.
Tom French: Massachusetts Fisheries and Wildlife, Natural History and Endangered Species Program (NHESP)
Charles Innis: Veterinarian, New England Aquarium
Scott Weber: Head Veterinarian, New England Aquarium
Lori Erb: Turtle Conservation Biologist, NHESP Massachusetts
Michele Sims: National Marine Life Center

The second meeting of the North East DiamondBack Terrapin Working Group was hosted by the New England Aquarium. We thanked Scott Weber and Charles Innis and New England Aquarium staff for their generous hospitality. The meeting began with brief introductions. Russ Burke provided historical background about the National Diamondback Terrapin Working Group and the work of the northeast group.

We reviewed and updated business from the first meeting (hosted by Chuck Landrey).

Populations in the northeast

One of the issues was the methodology for performing a meaningful census of dbt populations. With limited resources and the need to collect long term data, other techniques have been developed to collect information about population distribution.

Chuck Landrey gave a report about the progress of the on-line Turtle Atlas Project which was launched in test mode in March, '06. He reported that there have been numerous entries (about 700) but cautioned that there were a large number of incorrect species identifications. He described plans to incorporate a training module into the program, so that only individuals who are trained in turtle identification and have a password will be able to make entries. Questions were raised about the reliability of the data and about the

possibility of adding New York State to the survey. Chuck explained how the atlas could be used as a springboard to check out unexpected findings or sightings, to find new populations and as a way to link to the web sites of state agencies. He also explained how digital photos might be used to assist with turtle I.D. and how difficult it might be to get road kill data. Very few reports to the atlas were about diamondback terrapins.

Russ Burke described the terrapin-specific survey that was put together in 2005 with a student at Hofstra and distributed to a variety of groups including nature centers, state wildlife organizations, herpetological societies, pet shops, bait shops, etc. The survey asks for impressions about the status of terrapin populations (stable, increasing, decreasing). Suggestions were made to send it to surfcasters' associations, commercial fishermen and birding groups. The surveys have not yet been analyzed.

Threats

We discussed threats to terrapin populations and how factors that affect adults will have a different impact than factors that affect hatchlings. We discussed human-caused mortalities (threats caused by HI, human interactions) and the value of having access to samples of any dead terrapins that are found. Russ Burke and Scott Weber have initiated discussions with SEANET so that terrapins can be included in their surveys.

There was a brief discussion of population status by those groups who were engaged in long-term population studies: Sandy Neck, Wellfleet, Barrington and Jamaica Bay.

Headstarting

Headstarting was noted as a controversial issue for all turtle species. There appeared to be a consensus that resource management should focus on habitat protection but there might be some value for small scale headstarting programs. Two of the researchers present at the meeting (Auger and Brennessel) have headstarting programs that involve release of turtles into the wild. We discussed the issues around headstarting: reasons for headstarting are varied and include elements of conservation, education and/or research. Headstarting, as well as nest protection, are two issues that will be included in the Terrapin Management Plan that will be developed by Massachusetts. An overview of the successful headstarting program for Plymouth red bellied turtles was provided by Tom French.

Outreach

Chuck Landrey identified initiatives and resources that could involve others with terrapin conservation including a guideline on turtle observation and a wildlife-friendly kayaking guide. The SE-DTWG has produced a guide for amateur groups to monitor terrapin nesting success, and we should look at adapting this for our region.

Barbara Brennessel circulated a draft of a manual she put together on Terrapin Habitat Management and Conservation that can be distributed to Conservation Commissions and town planners.

She has a small grant to pay for its production and distribution. Please send suggestions to Barbara. She would like to get it in the mail before Spring, '07. PARC Southeast has their own version of this and PARC Northeast has one in the final stages of production.

Russ Burke has also drafted a terrapin brochure for the general public. It will be distributed at nature centers and other locations.

Other Business

Charlotte Sornborger described a new initiative for predator control at the Nochum Hill nesting site.

Russ Burke mentioned the issue of endocrine disruptors in Jamaica Bay.

We decided to meet again in Spring, '08. Location to be determined but several possibilities were mentioned. Bob Precott has offered to host us.

The next meeting of the National Diamondback Terrapin Working Group will be August 10-12, 2007 at Arlington ECHO in Millersville, MD. Information will be posted at the website: <http://www.dtwg.org/index.html>

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Brennessel

Sept. 18, 2006, revised Sept. 25, 2006