

Diamondback Terrapin

Watch Where You Step!

Northern diamondback terrapins (*Malaclemys terrapin terrapin*) sometimes lay and bury their fragile eggs in the soft dirt in this area during May, June, and July. They lay 4-18 pinkish-white eggs in a hole 4-8 inches deep. If you are lucky, maybe you will see some!

A Unique Species

Most turtles spend their entire lives either in the salty waters of the ocean or the fresh waters of rivers or lakes. The diamondback terrapin is the only species of turtle in North America that lives in brackish (slightly salty) water like the salt marsh here at Quinnipiac Meadows.

Diamondback terrapins get their name from the diamond-shaped markings and grooves on their shells. Their coloring and patterns are a lot like our fingerprints—no two individuals are alike! During the cold winter months, terrapins hibernate, remaining completely submerged and inactive. While they hibernate they are able to hold their breath for months! How long can you hold your breath?

Diamondback terrapins all have unique patterns on their shells and spotted necks.

REPTILES&L

Tough Times for Turtles

This incredible species almost went extinct less than a hundred years ago when terrapin stew was a very popular dish. Now it is illegal to collect or possess diamondback terrapins in Connecticut. Terrapins still face many threats due to predators and human-related hazards like habitat loss, being hit by cars, or getting caught in crab pots where they drown. Pots equipped with *bycatch reduction devices* allow large crabs in while keeping terrapins out.

The diamondback terrapin is listed as a state species of special concern in Connecticut and is considered endangered or threatened in many other states. The Quinnipiac Meadows Nature Preserve is an important safe haven to help these turtles thrive once again.



A diamondback terrapin wades in shallow water. If you travel in a canoe or kayak along the narrow channels of the salt marsh you might spot the heads of diamondback terrapins poking up out of the water.



A baby diamondback terrapin emerges from its shell after 9-15 weeks of incubation.

Diamondback Terrapin Range



Diamondback terrapins are found along the Atlantic Coast of the eastern United States from Cape Cod to the Florida Keys and west along the Gulf Coast to Texas. The subspecies, northern diamondback terrapin, that lives in Quinnipiac Meadows Preserve can be found from North Carolina up the coast to Massachusetts.

Made possible with the generous support of:
Yale Peabody Museum, Woman's Seamen's Friend Society of Connecticut, Greater New Haven Green Fund, Quinnipiac River Fund, Diamonds in the Marsh by Barbara Brennessel, CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, Kristina Vagos