

Turtles

There are 21 different species of turtles native to North Carolina (this includes marine/sea turtles). Most turtle species are either fully aquatic or semi-aquatic that inhabit water bodies across the state. Box turtles are the only completely terrestrial species in the state. Ten species of turtles are listed and cannot be harmed, harassed, or relocated without an Endangered Species Permit obtained from NCWRC RAPS and the US FWS for cases involving marine/sea turtle species and Bog turtles.

Listed Species Include: Bog turtle, Eastern chicken turtle, Diamondback terrapin, Eastern spiny softshell, Stripeneck musk turtle, Atlantic hawksbill sea turtle, Kemp's ridley sea turtle, Leatherback sea turtle, Green sea turtle, and the Loggerhead sea turtle.

What kind of damage is caused by turtles? Property damage caused by turtles is typically very minimal. The majority of turtle-related complaints stem from annoyances/nuisances as opposed to actual damage that does not warrant a depredation permit. Snapping turtles are the most commonly complained about species, especially when they are perceived to be eating fish from stocked ponds. Snapping turtles are omnivores and fish makes up only a small portion of their diet. Additional complaints can arise when female turtles are looking for areas to lay their eggs and begin digging holes on the property for nesting purposes. However, most turtle species will cover these holes after their eggs have been laid.

Can a WCA write a depredation permit? Yes, a depredation permit can be issued by a WCA but only if an agent can document that property damage has occurred. For questions on whether damage from turtles is substantial enough to warrant a depredation permit, contact the RAPS line at 919-707-0061.

Can turtles be relocated? Yes, non-listed species can be relocated to private property with landowner permission. If a turtle needs to be relocated, it is best to move the animal to a new location on the property if possible, as even short-distance relocations (more than 2 miles) often reduce the animal's ability to survive.

What can I do with sick or injured turtles? There are licensed wildlife [rehabilitators](#) across the state that can take in sick or injured turtles.

Are there any safety concerns? Some larger species of turtles (especially snapping turtles) can inflict a serious bite wound if they are not carefully handled. Additionally, turtles can carry salmonella so WCAs are advised to always wear gloves and wash their hands after directly handling a turtle. See the first pages of this document for general safety recommendations for handling wildlife.

Non-lethal Options:

- See the [General Considerations for Handling Wildlife](#) for general ways to prevent damage from wildlife.
- Education is the best coexisting option for turtles. Turtles are important regulators in aquatic ecosystems and eat vegetation, decaying matter, and only a small amount of fish within a water body. Many people think they are responsible for declines in fish populations, but these declines are almost always due to improper pond management practices, not turtles.
- Traps can be used to aid in relocation efforts of turtles. Methods of trapping vary based on the species of interest. Relocations under two miles are greatly preferred to long distance relocations.

Lethal Options:

- Education and relocation (especially short distances) is **GREATLY** preferred to lethal options.
- A turtle can be euthanized humanely (via [AVMA euthanasia guidelines](#) for reptiles) if a depredation permit has been written due to property damage.