



Diamondback Terrapin Volunteer Job Description

Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary

Project Background:

Since 1980, Mass Audubon's Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary has been monitoring Outer Cape populations of Diamondback Terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin*), a species listed as threatened by the state. After years of marking individual terrapins with unique identification numbers for tracking purposes, we began in 2005 to actively protect nests to prevent loss of eggs to predators.

Volunteers are an integral part of this successful conservation project and are needed from early-June to early-October to locate, protect, monitor, and process terrapin nests in various locations from Wellfleet to Orleans. Volunteers take at least one shift per week in a group of two to five people. Each group has an experienced shift leader to help assure compliance with established protocols, data quality, nest inventory, and safety.

Qualifications:

- Interest in wildlife biology and conservation
- Ability to work as part of a team
- Good communication skills and attention to detail
- Follows protocol to establish the knowledge of Diamondback Terrapin nesting behavior and skills for turtle handling and processing
- Ability to work outside in adverse field conditions for one to four hours at a time (depending on chosen location), with occasional extended shift durations during peak season
- Ability to walk or wade on sandy, uneven terrain for up to several miles depending upon location
- Ability to kneel on the ground while locating and processing nests
- Good interpersonal skills to educate members of the public encountered during field shifts
- Self-motivated and conscientious with a strong work ethic

Nesting Season Duties:

(Early-June to late-July)

- Monitor all approved site locations for the presence of adult females, completed nests, and depredated nests
- Nest protection
 - Verify nests by digging to top egg, then cover back up.
 - Protect nest with wire enclosures, stakes, and nest identification tag.
 - Relocate imperiled nests as required.
 - Accurately fill out a datasheet.
- Respond to depredated nests:
 - Verify nest by digging in chamber and collecting all egg shards in the vicinity of that nest chamber
 - Collect egg shards and dispose of
 - Accurately fill out a datasheet
- Respond to turtle activity reported by visitors or staff.
- Process adult females encountered.
- Rake nesting locations as required to remove confusing signs of activity.
- Maintain supplies in shift backpacks for use in the field.
- Follow shift leaders' instructions and ask questions. Notify the shift leader in advance of any shift absences or conflicts.

Hatchling Season Duties:

(Early-August to early-October)

- Excavate hatched nests and open nests at the direction of staff
 - Remove protective cage
 - Excavate nest chamber while spraying hatchlings down with water for examination
 - Healthy hatchlings get released during the shift, while underdeveloped hatchlings come back to the sanctuary's lab
 - Examine other possible nest contents i.e., under-developed eggs
 - Accurately complete the datasheet
- Respond to depredated nests
 - Verify nest by digging in chamber and collecting all egg shards in the vicinity of that nest chamber
 - Collect egg shards and dispose of
 - Accurately fill out a datasheet
- Perform an inventory of nest counts every shift
- Placement/retrieval of field equipment at monitored sites
- Rake nesting locations as required to remove confusing signs of activity
- Maintain supplies in shift backpacks for use in the field
- Follow shift leaders' instructions and ask questions. Notify the shift leader in advance of any shift absences or conflicts.

Frequently Asked Questions

May I join for only a part of the season?

We ask our volunteers to participate for the full nesting and/or hatchling season. If you need to miss an occasional shift, you are required to notify the shift leader and find a substitute as your replacement. Especially during peak season, full teams are imperative for a successful shift.

Do I have to be involved with both nesting and hatchling season?

No, the two seasons have separate trainings and sign-ups, so you can participate in just one if you choose. It is more common for volunteers to participate in both seasons, so they can observe the process from start to finish!

What does the training entail?

The training is a one-hour virtual training. It is recorded and is sent to everyone afterwards, so if you can't attend you can watch it later. There is no official in-field training, so you are expected to ask questions and learn from your experienced shift leaders.

What commitment is required?

This program requires at least one shift a week, at either 8 am or 5 pm. Depending on the location you sign up for and the stage of the nesting or hatchling season, a shift can take 30 minutes to four hours. We also require a one-hour training for both nesting and hatchling season, which usually takes place a week or two before the start date.

If you're interested in becoming a member of our volunteer diamondback terrapin team, please contact Jessica Ciarcia [by email](#) or by calling 508-349-2615, ext. 6109.