

2011 REPORT OF THE POPULATION STUDY OF DIAMONDBACK TERRAPIN AT DOUG RAYNER WILDLIFE REFUGE, NOCKUM HILL, BARRINGTON, RHODE ISLAND

The 22nd year of the population study, sponsored by the Barrington Land Conservation Trust, was conducted along the lines of previous years. The idea of “turtle gardens”, however was introduced. Lori Mortenson designed a brochure, based on the Wellfleet concept, to encourage residents along the Barrington and Palmer Rivers to include a small, sunny portion of their gardens for possible terrapin nesting. Future years will reveal their degree of success.

The earliest nesting began in late May and continued through mid-July. In all 93 individuals were identified, including 10 newly marked (about 10%) Total numbers were somewhat less than last year, likely due to less observational coverage in June. One terrapin was reported killed on Wampanoag Trail.

Individual excluders (IE's) protected 20 nests and about 20 in the common excluder (CE). Again this year, depredated unprotected nests were minimal (75); from tracks, it appeared that coyotes did most scavenging. Mike Tucker observed a fisher on the hill in early summer. One terrapin was brought to the hill from Bowden Ave., marked and released on the hill. Two nests were laid and protected at the end of Henry Drive Photographer Butch Lombardi continues to see terrapins on the Palmer River marshes.

The number of hatchlings released at the hill was 289. About 15 unprotected nests also were observed to have hatched, as well. Many nests were seen laid and unprotected in the agricultural fields; it is not known how many hatched successfully. All hatchlings were released on site or in nearby leaf litter; none were taken to the water's edge, a decision based on findings from Barbara Brennessel's "Diamonds in the Marsh".

Over the last 5-year period (2007, 2008, 2009 2010, 2011) we have identified 284 individual female terrapins. Counted each year, the 5-year totals have been 264,269,256,271,284. These numbers seem to indicate (as suggested in the 2010 report) that the population remains sustainable. In total, about 392 females have been marked in the 22 years of this study. An annual “guesstimate” of 284 living females, +/- 140 males, and unknown numbers of juveniles - brings a total of 425+. Many observers have noted that large numbers of turtle heads are

frequently seen in the upper reaches of the cove proper, likely a staging area for gathering and mating.

We use written protocols found on the Internet www.blct.org . A planning meeting was held on April 14, and a wrap-up meeting will be held on Thursday, November 3rd at 1 Wildacre Lane at 7:30 p.m.

Volunteers this summer included: Bob Caron, Bristol Community College; Olivia Griot, Barrington High School intern for the BLCT; Pete McCalmont, manager for the Doug Rayner Refuge; Jackie Senich, a BLCT board member; Larry Ginsberg, Butch Lombardi and Lori Vastano, all at-large volunteers; also, Penny Lachmann. We appreciate the cooperation of the Barrington Police Department which scheduled their use of the pistol range to accommodate the study.

Copies of the primary documents of the continuing studies are kept by the Barrington Land Conservation Trust www.BLCT.org and disk copies of the accumulated data are filed with the Rhode Island Natural History Survey at URI www.rinhs.org. Yearly reports are sent to RIDEM Fish and Wildlife and the Barrington Conservation Commission. Local contact for the study can be found at the BLCT website - currently Charlotte Sornborger c_sornborger@hotmail.com or by phone (401-245-8467).