

Handle With Care!

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Most people by now are likely familiar with the adage “put them off the road in the same direction they were heading,” but many may not realize that this really only applies to box turtles. If it’s a large female aquatic turtle, such as a slider, looking for a place to nest (about the only reason these turtles ever leave the water), it could be a disaster to pick it up. These females take on a large supply of water with which they will moisten their nest. If you pick one up, its defensive response will be to jettison the water, requiring it to return and get more before it can lay its eggs. This greatly extends the amount of time the turtle is forced to walk around on land, away from the safety of water, and also increases its chances of becoming egg bound or being hit by a vehicle.



A gorgeous terrapin found crossing Highway 58 near the Iron Steamer beach access in 2014.

Things can get tricky with turtles if you don't know which ones are which. When in doubt, the best course of action is probably to do nothing at all—do no harm. Turtles have been finding their own way around in this world for over 220 million years longer than humans have been here to “help” them, and sadly,

A mud turtle crossing the road near the aquarium. If a turtle is in motion, do not approach it or it will likely stop. Just wait and let it cross on its own.



the problems faced by these long-term survivors nowadays seem to be all of our making. Unless a turtle is in real and imminent danger, such as crossing a road or perhaps a lawn that is getting mowed, there is no reason to move, pick it up or otherwise interfere with it, and whatever you do, no matter how cute that tiny hatchling turtle looks, leave it right where it is and *please do not take it home*. I can tell you right now that when you call me in a couple of years after it has gotten to be just too much to handle, wanting to know if you can “donate” it to the aquarium . . . the answer will be no.

Frederick Boyce is the staff herpetologist at the NC Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores.

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