

Department of Biology and Chemistry
Faculty Publications and Presentations

Liberty University

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Field Notes: *Chelydra serpentina*
serpentina

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Chelydra serpentina serpentina (Eastern Snapping Turtle). VA: Accomack Co., Co. Rt. 638, ca. 3.9 km W jct. Co. Rt. 718; ca. 5.5 km W Onancock; 21 May 2001. Timothy R., Michele L., and Timothy W. Brophy.

According to Mitchell (1999. Checklist and keys to the amphibians and reptiles of Virginia's Eastern Shore. Catesbeiana 19: 3-18), the life histories of nearly all herpetofaunal species on Virginia's Eastern Shore remain virtually unknown. At 0645 h on 21 May 2001, we found a DOR *Chelydra s. serpentina* along Co. Rt. 638. Based on its position, the turtle seemed to be leaving an agricultural field and heading in the direction of a wooded area that had been partially clearcut in the last few years.

The adult female had the following straight-line measurements: greatest carapace length (232 mm), midline carapace length (225 mm), and midline plastron length (164 mm). Upon dissection, 18 shelled eggs were discovered in the abdominal cavity. The eggs were white, spherical, and each possessed a large dimple at one end. The diameter of 11 undamaged eggs ranged from 26.2–27.9 mm (measured with dial calipers) and averaged 27.0 ± 0.62 mm (mean \pm 1 SD).

Nesting on nearby Chincoteague and Assateague Islands occurs from mid-May through late June or early July. During this time, females deposit a single clutch of 8-46 (mean = 25.1, n = 13 clutches) spherical eggs with diameters of 23–33 mm (Mitchell, J. C. and J. M. Anderson. 1994. Amphibians and Reptiles of Assateague and Chincoteague Islands. Virginia Museum of Natural History Special Publication 2, Martinsville, Virginia. 120 pp.). Warming ambient temperatures and light rain seem to trigger nesting activity in female snapping turtles (Ernst, C. H. et al. 1994. Turtles of the United States and Canada. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C. 578 pp.). It had been warm and raining periodically for each of the three days prior to the discovery of this female turtle. She was undoubtedly searching for a suitable nesting site.

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Rana clamitans melanota (Northern Green Frog). VA: Pittsylvania Co., 181 Samuel Court. 22 September 2001 and 9 March 2002. Jason D. Gibson.

On 22 September 2001, I found a juvenile green frog foraging in grassy vegetation beside a spring-fed stream, and observed another green frog on 9 March 2002 at the same location. These represent early and late activity dates for this species in Pittsylvania County, and are the first documented records of green frogs from this county (Mitchell, J. C. and K. K. Reay. 1999. Atlas of Amphibians and Reptiles in Virginia. Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Special Publication No. 1, Richmond Virginia. 122 pp.). A color slide will be deposited in the Virginia Museum of Natural History.

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