

Barbara Brennessel

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Diamonds in the Marsh

*The first book-length investigation
of a fascinating turtle*

She's the mascot for the University of Maryland's sports teams (their slogan: Fear the Turtle) and her ancestors were nearly driven to extinction by Victorians who indulged in turtle soup. But as she buries herself in the mud every night to sleep, the diamondback terrapin knows none of this. The size of a dinner plate, with a lifespan of at least forty years, she is the only turtle in North America who can live in brackish and salty waters.

The diamondback terrapin is named for the beautiful concentric rings on its shell. Its habitat ranges from Cape Cod to Corpus Christi, Texas, with seven subspecies identified along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. Several diamondback populations have been the subjects of ecological studies in recent years, but most of that information was buried in scientific literature and various state and federal reports—until now.

Synthesizing all known research on this remarkable animal, *Diamonds in the Marsh* is the first full-scale natural history of the diamondback terrapin. Focusing on the northern diamondback, Barbara Brennessel examines its evolution, physiology, adaptations, behavior, growth patterns, life span, genetic diversity, land use, reproduction, and early years. She also discusses its relationship to humans, first as an important food source from colonial times through the nineteenth century, and more recently as a cultural icon, frequently depicted in Native American art and design. She concludes with a look at contemporary hazards to the terrapin, and urges continued study of this marvelous creature.



*A Natural History
of the Diamondback
Terrapin*

Diamonds in the Marsh

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"More than a mere treatise on terrapins, this is a book of fascinating facts about the lives of these turtles, intermingled with pertinent history—written throughout with lucidity and subtle humor."

—Charlotte B. Sornborger, Terrapin Researcher, Barrington Land Conservation Trust and President, Audubon Society of Rhode Island

"Brennessel introduces us to the unsung heroes working to ensure the Terrapin's future. Her book offers inspiration to those wondering, 'What can I do?'"

—Charles Landrey, Director, The Turtle Conservation Project, www.NewEnglandTurtles.org

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BARBARA BRENNESSEL is Professor of Biology at Wheaton College. Trained as a biochemist, she is a summer resident of Wellfleet, Cape Cod. She shifted her research interests to the diamondback terrapin after spending the summer of 2001 researching the species with the Massachusetts Audubon Society's Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary.

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