

Welcome Spring & Turtles, Toads, Salamanders and Frogs!

By Christine Clements, AGC Member

Spring is here, and that means our local turtles and amphibians are active once again in our gardens and neighborhoods.

Turtles and amphibians, including frogs, toads, and salamanders, are a helpful addition to our gardens, providing natural pest control. These native animals need little from us to thrive in our gardens and property.

In my garden, I have seen most native frog and toad species, many salamanders, and several turtle species. We live near woodlands and several vernal pools, and witness their annual spring migrations in our yard.

Last winter I completed the Harris Center training on Salamander Crossing, and learned so much about this annual migration. The Harris Center for Conservation Education in Hancock NH offers many free online resources, as well as in person classes and seminars.

During the summer, I rescued several turtles from local roads. Most were uninjured, and only needed to be carried across a road. One was a badly injured, endangered Blandings Turtle. When I contacted the Turtle Rescue League, I immediately received help and a wealth of information. I delivered the turtle to them for care with their wildlife rehabbers.

I asked them what would be important for gardeners to know about turtles in our gardens and local areas.

Which Turtles and Amphibians are native to New Hampshire?

There are 7 native turtle species. Occasionally a non-native turtle is observed in New Hampshire resulting from released pets, most commonly red-eared sliders. There are 10 native frog and toad species, and 11 wild salamander species.

How can we help native turtles and amphibians in our gardens and communities?

- Provide water. As simple as a birdbath, large plant saucer, or shallow bowl at ground level helps these species access water during spring and summer, if there is not a natural source.
- Reduce pesticide use. Amphibians are especially prone to pesticides.
- Plant natives and reduce lawn. This provides more plant and insect diversity, which is healthy for turtles and amphibians foraging for food.
- Provide cover, wood and brush piles, compost heaps, rock walls and other features offer shelter from predators and excessive heat.
- Walk your lawn before mowing, many turtles are injured by mowers.
- Check on your dog outdoors. One of the more common calls the turtle rescue receives are from dogs chewing on a turtle's shell. The shell is made from bone, and this injury can be treated by a wildlife rehabber.
- Keep a basic "kit" in your vehicle for injured turtles. This kit may include a box or plastic tote, a towel, blanket, or gardening gloves.
- Contact town conservation groups to request town signage at high traffic turtle crossing areas, seasonally or year round.

When do amphibians migrate from their winter hibernation?

On the first warm rainy nights of spring, amphibians migrate from woods to wetlands in a natural phenomenon known as "Big Night." It can be a dangerous journey, especially when they must cross busy roads to reach their breeding pools. To reduce the risk of roadkill, The Harris Center trains community scientists to serve on Salamander Crossing Brigades at amphibian road crossings throughout the Monadnock Region.

Native Turtle Questions

Should I help a non-injured turtle cross the road if it is headed toward danger?

Yes, if it is safe for you to place the turtle off the road, in the same direction it was traveling, then they can continue their path. Do not change their direction, they will simply turn around to go back the way they were crossing.

Should I relocate turtles, or release a pet turtle, to a new location?

No. Turtles are largely territorial, and a relocated turtle has slim survival odds. Turtles kept as pets, even if native species, carry diseases that can spread through a wild turtle population. Many animal shelters now include turtles in their shelters, and some pet shops are able to accept pet turtles that must be surrendered.

My child or grandchild brought home a wild turtle, or amphibian, may they keep it as a pet, for even a short time?

No. Allow them to enjoy observing it closely, for up to a few hours, and then release it and make sure they wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water. All turtles and amphibians can harbor salmonella bacteria, which can cause serious illness, especially in children. 9/10 turtles, domestic or wild, naturally harbor salmonella, and it rarely harms them, but they can infect people. Children touching these species, and not washing their hands is a common route of infection.

What is the NH Turtle Rescue?

NH Turtle Rescue is a small nonprofit organization based in Nottingham and operated by two licensed wildlife rehabilitators in the state of New Hampshire. They work closely with their mentor, Chris Bogard, who has been rehabilitating turtles for over 20 years.

What is the Turtle Rescue League?

Turtle Rescue League is a larger non-profit, founded in 2010 in Southbridge MA. They offer a free 24/7 phone/ online messaging service for all injured turtles.

Every year, they admit hundreds of injured native turtles to provide medical treatment and prepare them for release back into their homes in the wild. Additionally, they incubate eggs recovered from dangerous locations.

I found an injured turtle what should I do?

If you can, gently place the turtle in a box, or sturdy container, shell side up, using a towel or gloves.

Call TRL for instructions. They will ask for a photo of the turtle, and provide information to you by phone.

Over 90% of turtle injuries are survivable once the turtle is in the care of a licensed rehabilitator. In most cases, the turtle can be treated at their center and properly released. Even badly injured turtles can often be saved. **Do not assume a turtle is dead if it is not moving.** A mortally wounded turtle can live for days after being injured. It is a great kindness to get them off the hot, noisy pavement.

Demonstration of rescuing an injured turtle using a kit kept in your car.

Resources:

Tips for Helping Amphibians in Your Gardens

National Wildlife Federation

<https://blog.nwf.org/2018/05/five-tips-to-help-frogs-and-toads-in-your-yard/>

Turtle Rescue League

Southbridge, MA

<https://turtlerescueleague.org/about/>

New Hampshire Turtle Rescue

Nottingham, NH

found an injured turtle? Please call (603) 417-4944

<https://nhturtlerescue.org/faqs>

The Harris Center Salamander Crossing, information and training

online

<https://harriscenter.org/programs-and-education/citizen-science/salamander-crossing-brigades>

NH State Rules about Reptiles and Amphibians

<https://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/nongame/rules-amp-rept.html>