



# Diamonds in the Marsh: A Natural History of the Diamondback Terrapin

*Barbara Brennessel*

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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, she can live at least forty years and 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.

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