

Outdoors

EAGLE RIVER, WI 54521

vcnewsreview.com

Time to keep watchful eye for lowly turtles

IT'S THAT time of year when 11 different turtle species will be crossing Wisconsin roads to search out higher ground during the egg-laying season, a time when motorists can make a big difference in the survival of adults and the next generation of turtles.

I was prepared, with the late spring, to wait a week before printing this reminder, but seeing a squashed snapping turtle on Highway 17 last Friday convinced me that our recent heat spell has turtles back on their regular schedule.

Early to mid June is when turtles emerge from rivers, lakes and wetlands to lay eggs, and quite often they target traditional sites in well-drained sandy uplands that are often on the other side of a road or highway.

The lowly turtles don't get a lot of respect, especially when careless or ruthless motorists crush them. I say ruthless because some studies have shown that a small percentage of motorists, and men most of the time, actually hit the gravel to intentionally run over turtles.

Biologists with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) say death by getting run over by cars is the leading cause of the decline in Wisconsin turtle numbers.

So what can we do? The most effective prevention is driving with caution near wetlands, rivers and any place you see a yellow turtle stencil on a roadway or a turtle crossing sign. They are going to lay those eggs or die trying; you can bet on that.

These aren't deer jumping out in front of you or banging into your side panels as you pass. They move like turtles and should be easy to miss most of the time.

The other thing you can do, with highway safety in mind,

is pull over and help a turtle cross in the direction they were pointing.

Turtle nests are also exposed to high levels of predation as populations of nest-raiding animals such as raccoons, skunks, fox and coyotes grow to historically high levels.

And maybe the worst problem, one that surfaced most recently, is an increased demand for pet turtles that has fueled the illegal turtle trade.

Last month, a 41-year-old Virginia man pleaded guilty in federal court to collecting and trafficking hundreds of turtles, many of them rare species such as the eastern box turtle.

The guy received about \$12,700 while using Facebook Marketplace for the sales. Many of the purchasers, in turn, smuggled the turtles from the United States to Hong Kong and China for the illegal pet trade.

These rare box turtles typically reach a length of up to six inches and can live more than 100 years. Turtles with more colorful markings are particularly prized in the domestic and foreign pet trade market.

This whole illegal pet trade is pretty disturbing. At a time when the experts say at least 40% of the U.S. freshwater turtle and tortoise species are threatened with extinction, this illegal trafficking has become a huge problem.

On March 3 of this year, customs agents at Manila's Ninoy Aquino International Airport uncovered more than 1,500 rare, live turtles duct-taped in four pieces of luggage.

"The soaring demand for turtles at home and abroad could be the downfall of ancient reptiles that outlasted the dinosaurs," the DNR stated.



A big snapping turtle gets off the roadway safely as it takes the annual egg-laying trek to higher, well-drained uplands. The public can aid long-term turtle survival by

staying watchful as they drive and by helping turtles cross busy roadways safely. Some turtles can live more than 100 years. — Photo By The Author

Poaching turtles has a large-scale and pervasive conservation impact, they say, because turtles are long-lived and slow to reproduce. When people take turtles, they take reproductive potential out of wild populations that are already at risk.

According to the DNR, some Wisconsin species must reach old ages and participate in many nesting seasons to reproduce successfully. Blanding's turtles and wood turtles cannot reproduce until they are 12 to 20 years old, while others, like ornate box turtles, lay only a few eggs a year.

The Three Lakes Waterfront Association is leading the charge in local turtle protection. They've signed and otherwise marked all of the known turtle crossing areas on town roads, including road art on the pavement as a reminder.

"Please slow down and maneuver to avoid contact, or stop and help the turtles across the road in the direction they are headed," said board member Jon Willman. "Either way, you help protect a unique member of our North Woods ecosystem."

An online program to report turtle crossings started in 2012 on the DNR's website. Since that time, people have provided more than 7,500 reports — with roughly half of those identifying turtle crossings.

That online site has also allowed people to report nearly 70 locations of previously undocumented populations of ornate box turtles, wood turtles and Blanding's turtles, which are all either endangered or a threatened species.

The information is entered into the Natural Heritage Inventory, a

database of rare species locations and populations information.

The database is consulted by DNR staff reviewing plans for roadway and other developments.

Turtles are up against tough odds, even without highway mortality. Biologists say that as few as 5% of eggs laid survive to hatch and, of those, only one in 100 may survive to reproductive age of 10 years or more.

If you want to protect a nest site where eggs were laid, place wire mesh material over the area and bury several inches on each side. Openings of three inches or slightly larger will allow hatchlings to exit the nest.

Time to drive with care and keep a watchful eye out for poaching activity — especially if they are selling turtles on Facebook.

Spongy moth outbreak predicted in North Woods

The public is advised that the next two months could bring the worst spongy moth caterpillar outbreak in more than a decade, according to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Invasive spongy moth caterpillars, formerly known as the gypsy moth, strip trees of their leaves, potentially killing high-value trees. They prefer to feed on oak, birch, crabapple, aspen and willow leaves, but will also feed on many other tree and shrub species.

Southern parts of Wisconsin and parts of the North Woods are already in a high-population outbreak that is predicted to spread, as stated by DNR Forest Health Specialist Bill McNee of Oshkosh.

"Populations have remained high due to a low incidence of caterpillar-killing diseases last summer," said McNee. "In addition, weather conditions are favorable for the caterpillars and unfavorable for Entomophaga maimaiga, a fungus that kills spongy moth caterpillars."

He added that property owners are encouraged to examine their trees and take action.

Management options include using burlap collection bands, physically destroying caterpillars, or applying insecticide to protect trees and reduce nu-

sance caterpillar numbers.

"Insecticide treatments can be a suitable option for high-value host trees, but are usually not practical for woodlots," McNee noted. "Insecticide treatments are most effective when the caterpillars are small."

Property owners should plan for insecticide treatments ahead of time to help secure an applicator and avoid a last-minute rush when pesticide application businesses may already be very busy. Resources for finding a qualified pesticide applicator include the Wisconsin Arborist Association, International Society of Arboriculture, and a local phone book.

Watering yard trees weekly during dry periods to help reduce tree stress and aid a tree's recovery from heavy leaf loss by the caterpillars is also an effective measure.

McNee urges property owners to wait to cut down any trees that have lost their leaves. Healthy hardwood trees usually produce a new set of leaves a few weeks later.

Forest management may need to be postponed in forest stands with expansive leaf loss, he added. Trees will be stressed from heavy leaf loss and often unable to handle the additional stress from forest thinning.

McNee also highlighted that stressed trees are already at an elevated risk of dying and will often die if



Wisconsin residents are advised to take precautions ahead of a predicted spongy moth outbreak across the state that could be the worst population spike in more than a decade. —Contributed Photo

they lose a lot of leaves in 2023. Low-vigor oak trees are likely to be infested by the native beetle, two-lined chestnut borer, contributing to tree decline and death.

If all else fails, individuals can consult an arborist or forester for additional management recommendations.

"Those who find spongy moth caterpillars should avoid touching them as the hairs often cause a skin rash, welt, or other irritation," stated McNee. Rubbing alcohol can help to remove the hairs and chemical irritants from skin that is exposed to the hairs."

Spongy moth populations

may have a temporary, large increase in an area about every 10 years, according to McNee. Many areas currently experiencing a second or third year of the spongy moth outbreak will likely see a population decline or collapse due to diseases or starvation.

"Predicting where and when the decline will happen is difficult, and heavy leaf loss often occurs before the caterpillar population collapses," he added.

For more information, visit spongymoth.wi.gov/pages/home.aspx, or dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/foresthealth/spongymoth.

Fishing with the Guides

By George Langley



Water temps normal; walleyes in weeds

An absolutely incredible string of summer-like days was interrupted last Friday by some rain, but even that is welcome now. A very warm end of May was just what we needed to get those water temps up to normal. The only fly in that ointment: mosquitoes, and lots of them. Take repellent along anywhere outside.

Water levels are pretty good now after that extreme winter with all of its snow. The trilliums are in bloom and the woods are absolutely beautiful at this time of year. Water temps are in the 70s and fishing in general has been quite good for all species.

Walleye fishing is good with fish moving into the weeds and onto the mud flats. Weed walleyes will be the order of the day now until the mayfly hatch, which is just starting. These weeds are full of fish and have developed quite nicely due to the warmer weather. You can "jig" through these weeds with patience, or use weedless jigs. At this point, all types of live bait have been working, but we feel that minnows are still the best for them.

Slip bobbers with minnows are another effective technique for these weedy walleyes. In general, look for the deepest weeds you can find, but they will surprise us daily with their use of shallow weeds - especially on the Chain.

Northerns are hitting very well in those weeds also. These fish at time drive the walleye anglers crazy with "bite offs" but are a lot of fun to catch. If you know how to fillet out the "Y" bones, they are delicious. They'll hit anything that moves. The more flash the better.

Muskie action is starting slow as these fish recover from their spawn. The smaller, warmer lakes are more active than the bigger lakes, where they are still spawning. With the colder water, slow down your retrieve a little and use smaller baits.

Panfish action is absolutely fantastic for both crappie and bluegill. For the 'gills use worms or waxworms. For the crappies use either minnows or any of the small plastics. Perch can be found in the weeds.

What a great start to the season.

Good luck and good fishin'!

COURTESY OF EAGLE SPORTS GUIDE SERVICE