



Turtles of New Jersey

**By Brian Zarate, Senior Zoologist and
Nicole Gerard, Seasonal Staff**

New Jersey is home to 13 species of freshwater and brackish-water turtles which includes two non-native species introduced to our waters over several decades. In addition to the turtles described below, there are other non-native species that can be found from time to time. Turtles are typically active from March through November and nest on land between mid-May and early July.

Throughout the state our turtles inhabit a variety of aquatic and wetland environments frequented and enjoyed by anglers. Major threats to the health of our turtle populations are loss of habitat, road mortality, and illegal collection. There are no turtle species in the state that can be taken from the wild as pets and it is illegal to release captive or pet turtles into the wild.

New Jersey has four turtle species with a conservation status of *Endangered*, *Threatened* or *Special Concern* and we'd encourage you to submit your sightings of these most imperiled turtles to New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife using the form found here: <http://njfishandwildlife.com/ensp/rprtform.htm>.



Snapping Turtle

Scientific Name: *Chelydra serpentina*
Description: Largest freshwater turtle; adult females average 14.4 inches and males 19.44 inches.
Habitat: Slow-moving, permanent, fresh waterbodies with muddy bottoms.
Range: Statewide
Photo by Brian Zarate



Eastern Musk Turtle
Scientific Name: *Stemotherus odoratus*
Description: Also called "Stinkpot;" adult females average 5.9 inches and males 5.4 inches; hinged lower shell.
Habitat: Slow-moving bodies of water with soft bottoms, including but not limited to rivers, streams, lakes, ponds and swamps.
Range: Statewide
Photo by Brian Zarate



Eastern Mud Turtle
Scientific Name: *Kinostemon subrubrum subrubrum*
Description: Adult females average 4.9 inches and males 4.3 inches; lower shell has two hinges.
Habitat: Slow-moving, shallow waterbodies with muddy bottoms including but not limited to ponds, lakes, freshwater ditches and marshes.
Range: Southern and Central NJ; limited northern distribution.
Photo by Robert T. Zappalorti



Spotted Turtle
 (Special Concern)
Scientific name: *Clemmys guttata*
Description: Dark shell with yellow spots; adult females average 5.6 inches and males 4.8 inches.
Habitat: Preference is towards shallow wetland habitats including but not limited to cattail marshes and small vernal pools.
Range: Statewide
Photo by Brian Zarate



Bog Turtle

(State Endangered)

Scientific name: *Glyptemys muhlenbergii*

Description: Dark shell, orange patch on neck, adult females average 3.8 inches and males 4.5 inches.

Habitat: Ground water fed wetlands including but not limited to fens and wet meadows.

Range: Statewide

Photo by Brian Zarate



Wood Turtle

(State Threatened)

Scientific name: *Glyptemys insculpta*

Description: Adult females average 8.0 inches and males 9.2 inches.

Habitat: Wood turtles inhabit slow moving streams where the surrounding landscape includes wetlands and upland habitat.

Range: Northern and Central NJ

Photo by Brian Zarate



Eastern Box Turtle

(Special Concern)

Scientific name: *Terrapene carolina carolina*

Description: Domed shell pattern and color highly variable, adult females average 7.8 inches and males 9.3 inches, hinged lower shell.

Habitat: Prefers terrestrial habitats but can be found in shallow pools on a hot day.

Range: Statewide

Photo by Brian Zarate



Northern Diamondback Terrapin

Scientific name: *Malaclemys terrapin terrapin*

Description: New Jersey's only true brackish-water turtle, adult females average 11.3 inches and males 5.5 inches.

Habitat: Coastal salt marshes, estuaries, bays and tidal creeks.

Range: Atlantic Coast

Photo by Brian Zarate



Northern Map Turtle

Scientific name: *Graptemys geographica*

Description: Adult females average 10.7 inches and males 6.3 inches.

Habitat: Large bodies of water such as rivers or lakes.

Range: Delaware River and portions of Raritan River and associated canals of each river.

Photo by Brian Zarate



Red-eared Slider

(Non-Native)

Scientific name: *Trachemys scripta elegans*

Description: Popular pet turtle that is often released into the wild; adult females average 11.9 inches and males 9.1 inches.

Habitat: Preference is towards still, freshwater habitats with lots of vegetation and muddy bottoms. Common in lakes, swamps and slow moving rivers.

Range: Statewide

Photo by John Parke



Northern Red-bellied Cooter

Scientific name: *Pseudemys rubriventris*

Description: Frequently seen basking; large adult females average 15.7 inches and males 11.6 inches.

Habitat: Relatively deep waterbodies including ponds, rivers, lakes and streams.

Range: Southern and Central NJ; limited northern distribution.

Photo by Brian Zarate



Eastern Painted Turtle

Scientific name: *Chrysemys picta picta*

Description: Frequently seen basking; adult females average 10.0 inches and males 6.0 inches.

Habitat: Preference towards slow-moving, permanent waterbodies with soft, muddy bottoms and abundant vegetation. This includes lakes, ponds swamps marshes, rivers and creeks.

Range: Statewide

Photo by Brian Zarate



Eastern Spiny Softshell

(Non-native)

Scientific name: *Apalone spinifera spinifera*

Description: Adult females average 21.3 inches and males 8.5 inches; leathery-appearing shell; long, narrow snout.

Habitat: Rivers

Range: Statewide

Photo by Tom Pluto

Waterbody Highlights

Spruce Run Reservoir

Surrounded by the rolling hills of Hunterdon County, Spruce Run Reservoir is an on-stream water storage reservoir that became operational in 1963. It is the third largest reservoir in the state after Round Valley and Wanaque reservoirs, and holds 11 billion gallons spread out over 1,290 surface acres, with 15 miles of shoreline. The grounds surrounding the reservoir are managed by three different entities, (Division of Fish and Wildlife, Parks and Forestry, and NJ Water Supply Authority), so be aware that different rules and regulations apply. Spruce Run Recreation Area is popular among anglers, boaters, swimmers, and campers.

Shoreline Access: The majority of the reservoir can be accessed from the shoreline. The only area in which public access is restricted falls within NJ Water Supply Authority property from the intersection of Union Road and Rupells Road northeast to Echo Lane which is off of Route 31 along the northeast portion of the reservoir.

Spruce Run Recreation Area (State Park) charges an entrance fee per vehicle from Memorial Day weekend to Labor Day from 8am - 5pm during the week and 7am - 5pm on the weekend. NJ Resident \$5 weekday and \$10 weekend. Non-Resident \$10 weekday and \$20 weekend. The State Park Pass is available for New Jersey residents at \$50; Non-Resident \$75. A boat launch can be found within the Spruce Run Recreation Area. Electric and gasoline engines (10 hp limit) are allowed, in addition to canoes and kayaks. Boat rentals are available seasonally and boat storage (dry) is available year round.

This boat launch is open 24/7 and is covered by

your park entrance fee. (No fee is charged if arriving prior to or after previously mentioned park hours.)

No fees are required on Clinton Wildlife Management Area (Fish and Wildlife).

Game Species Present: Largemouth Bass, Smallmouth Bass, Black Crappie, Hybrid Striped Bass, Northern Pike, Channel Catfish, Common Carp, assorted panfish.

The Division of Fish and Wildlife stocks the reservoir annually with Northern Pike, Hybrid Striped Bass, and Channel Catfish. Surplus Smallmouth Bass are also stocked during most years.

During a statewide coolwater fisheries assessment, conducted during 2014 and 2015, it was determined that Spruce Run Reservoir was superior to all other waters in NJ for Northern Pike. In addition, it has an enormous population of trophy Black Crappie, found throughout the lake during the spring surveys. Although this impoundment is fed by several streams that support wild trout populations (Spruce Run Creek, Mulhockaway Creek, Black Brook, and Willoughby Brook), it has very little oxygen below the depth of 13 feet during the summer, and therefore is no longer managed for trout. In fact, fishing is excellent for Hybrid Striped Bass in the summer time as long as you fish in the upper water column. Summer months also yield some of the best Channel Catfish opportunities on this side of the Delaware River. Porpoise-sized Carp frequent the shallow coves in good numbers. Bass fishing can be difficult, primarily due to the lack of weed beds and other forms of structure.



Driving Directions

From the intersections of Interstate 78W and Route 31N, follow 31 north to the third traffic light - Van Syckels Road. Turn left and continue 1.5 miles to the Park entrance which is on the left.



Manasquan Reservoir



The 770-acre Manasquan Reservoir, a source of water for municipalities and utilities, is owned and operated by the NJ Water Supply Authority. It is filled with water pumped from the Manasquan River. Timber Swamp Brook is the sole tributary that enters this man made reservoir.

The Reservoir is open year round for boat and shoreline fishing, however wading is prohibited. Only electric motors are allowed and boaters are required to wear PFDs at all times.

Game Species Present: Largemouth and Smallmouth bass, Hybrid Striped Bass, Muskellunge, and Channel Catfish. Panfish species, especially Black Crappies, thrive in the abundant, submersed standing timber. A land locked population of

Alewife herring provides excellent forage for many of the abovementioned species.

Manasquan Reservoir is annually stocked with Muskellunge, Channel Catfish and Hybrid Striped Bass. Largemouth Bass and Smallmouth Bass have been stocked.

Amenities include a boat ramp, boat rentals, bike rentals, a 5-mile perimeter trail, a Visitor Center and an Environmental Center. Recreational activities are overseen by the Monmouth County Park System.

See: <http://www.monmouthcountyparks.com/> and search on "Manasquan Reservoir."



Driving Directions

Garden State Parkway to Exit 98, Interstate 195 west. Proceed on I-195 west to Exit 28B, Rt. 9 north-Freehold. Stay in right lane when entering Rt. 9 north. At first traffic light, turn right onto Georgia Tavern Road. Follow Georgia Tavern Road for 0.3 mile. Continue straight for Environmental Center on right or turn right onto Windeler Rd. and continue 1.5 miles to the Visitor Center Reservoir Area on left.

State Hwy. 9 south from Freehold to Georgia Tavern Rd. Use Jughandle to turn left onto Georgia Tavern Rd. Proceed as above.

Union Lake



At 898 acres, Union Lake is the largest impoundment in Cumberland County and all of Southern New Jersey. In 1982 the Division of Fish and Wildlife, through the Green Acres Program purchased Union Lake. The dam was categorized as a high hazard and replaced in 1989. The newly constructed dam incorporated a fish ladder for the passage of anadromous fishes.

Union Lake is managed as a Wildlife Management Area, by the Division of Fish and Wildlife. The lake is open to fishing year round, 24 hours a day. Most of the surrounding property is part of the Wildlife Management Area, however much of the eastern shoreline consists of private residences and City of Millville property. Two boat access areas are present, one on the western shore maintained by the Division of Fish and Wildlife and one southeastern

corner owned by the City of Millville. A boat ramp maintenance permit, \$15, is required for the State boat ramp, if the individual does not possess a valid New Jersey fishing or hunting license. The City boat ramp is free of charge. Gas powered outboard motors (up to 10 hp) are allowed as well as electric motors, kayaks and canoes.

Game Species Present: The lake has a diverse fish population consisting of Largemouth Bass, Smallmouth Bass, Channel Catfish, Black Crappie, Bluegill, Yellow Perch, White Perch, Chain Pickerel and the occasional Striped Bass. Growth rates of game species are good as the result of an abundant forage base consisting of panfish, Alewife and Blueback Herring and Gizzard Shad.

The lake has been stocked with both Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass.



Driving Directions

Rt. 55 to Exit 27 for Rt. 47 toward Millville.

Bear right on High St. then bear right on Sharp St for 1.5 miles.

Turn right on Rt. 49 then turn right on Carmel Rd.

Boat launch and parking are .6 miles on right.