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EARLY TERRESTRIAL EMERGENCE OF A HATCHLING NORTHERN DIAMOND-BACKED TERRAPIN (*MALACLEMYS TERRAPIN TERRAPIN*) ON THE EASTERN SHORE OF VIRGINIA -- Most of the information available on nest emergence and overwintering of hatchling *Malaclemys t. terrapin* in the mid-Atlantic region suggests that they emerge from the nest in late summer of the same year in which the eggs were deposited (Ernst et al., 1994; Mitchell, 1994). Willem Roosenburg, Russell Burke, Scott Smith, and Paula Henry (pers. comm., April 2005) noted that all of the hatchlings in nests they have observed in Maryland and on Long Island, New York, hatched in the year they were produced. The only published summer nest emergence date in Virginia is 27 August (B. Truitt, *in* Mitchell, 1994). Several other turtles in Virginia have been documented to overwinter in the nest and emerge the following spring (Mitchell, 1994). Here we report an observation of late winter activity of a hatchling Northern Diamond-backed Terrapin on Virginia's Eastern Shore that suggests overwintering in the nest.

At approximately 1000 h EST on 22 March 2005, one of us (PD) found an active hatchling *M. t. terrapin* (Fig. 1) walking along the beach access road on Fisherman Island, Eastern Shore of Virginia/Fisherman Island National Wildlife Refuge, Northampton County, Virginia (37° 05' 52.17" N, 75° 58' 30.82" W). The turtle lacked any growth marks on the carapacial scutes supporting our identification of a hatchling stage (Fig. 1). The weather was sunny that day with a high of 10° C (at time of capture) and a low for the previous night of 0° C. Rain in the previous 24 h was 0.25 cm. PD first saw the turtle's tracks and followed them to the hatchling. No other turtles were seen despite additional searching. Nesting females use this area regularly.



Fig. 1. Hatchling *Malaclemys terrapin terrapin* found on Fisherman Island, Virginia on 22 March 2005.

This observation represents either a late-winter emergence of a hatchling that overwintered in the nest or the emergence of a hatchling that entered a terrestrial overwintering site after emergence from the nest the previous August or September. Either may be correct because Lawler & Musick (1972) described a juvenile with two lines of arrested growth that was overwintering in a dune 0.3 m below the surface in Gloucester County, Virginia. It was found on 7 November 1967, reburied, and emerged naturally on 23 April 1968. Terrapins raised in artificial impoundments in coastal North Carolina at the turn of the 20th century emerged from terrestrial hibernation in March and April (Coker, 1906). The emergence from a terrestrial overwintering site and activity by this hatchling in late March is also significant because it indicates that these small turtles can initiate activity in cool weather. *Malaclemys t. terrapin* is understudied in the Virginia portion of its range. Additional cool weather observations may reveal other unknown aspects of the behavior and ecology of this species.

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