

Keep Texas Wild

TURTLE HURDLES

Slow and steady won't win this race, unless people help.



» TURTLE POWER!

TURTLES HAVE BEEN AROUND SINCE DINOSAURS roamed the earth over 100 million years ago. All turtles are cold-blooded reptiles. "Cold-blooded" means that their temperature changes as the air or water temperature around them changes. Female turtles lay their eggs in holes that they dig in the ground and leave. Young turtles are born having to take care of themselves. Nine species of Texas turtles are endangered or threatened, so it is important for us to help them survive.

Red-eared sliders

» AQUATIC (WATER) TURTLES

Sea Turtles

Kemp's ridley



PHOTO © LARRY DITTO

THE WORLD'S SMALLEST and rarest sea turtle is found on Texas and Mexico beaches. It's called the Kemp's ridley turtle. Volunteers help in many ways to make sure the turtle eggs hatch and that the hatchlings make it safely to the ocean. There is even a specially trained dog that sniffs out turtle eggs that have been covered with sand.



Leatherback

THE HUGE LEATHERBACK looks like a turtle with no shell, but its shell is actually like leather soaked in oil. Their shape and the long ridges down their back help them to swim faster and dive deeper than other turtles. The LOGGERHEAD is named for its large head. More than 100 species of plants and animals can take a ride by attaching themselves to the loggerhead's shell. The HAWKSBILL tears sea sponges to bits with its hawk-like beak. They have been prized for their beautiful shells. The GREEN turtle is friendly to scuba divers. Their green color comes from the algae and sea grasses they love to eat.

PHOTO © JESSE CANCELMO

» FRESHWATER TURTLES



THE MOST COMMON aquatic turtle in Texas is the RED-EARED SLIDER. The "red" is for the red stripe behind each eye. The "slider" comes from the way they slide off logs and rocks into the water. They love sunning themselves so much that they even stack themselves on top of each other to do it! YELLOW MUD TURTLES are actually olive green, but have yellow patches on their heads and necks. They eat tadpoles and insects, and live in ponds and lakes. The shell of a TEXAS MAP TURTLE is covered with yellow-orange swirls that look like the markings on a road map. The ALLIGATOR SNAPPING TURTLE has a little piece of flesh in its mouth that looks like a worm when the turtle opens its mouth under water. When a prey animal tries to bite the "worm," they become dinner themselves. Snap!

Red-eared slider



PHOTO © ROLF NUSSBAUMER



PHOTO BY TPNB



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Alligator snapping turtle

Yellow mud turtle

» TERRESTRIAL (LAND) TURTLES

YOU CAN FIND ORNATE BOX TURTLES just about anywhere in Texas. "Ornate" means fancy, and these turtles are decorated with bright yellow starbursts. Unlike its four-toed cousin, the THREE-TOED BOX TURTLE has ... well, you guessed it, three toes on each foot. These turtles have shells that can completely close to keep them safe, but the TEXAS TORTOISE does not. Tortoises have a heavy, dome-shaped shell that hides them well and keeps them from getting crushed.

Hello!

PHOTOS BY TPWD

Good night!

Three-toed box turtle

Ornate box turtle

Texas tortoise

ORNATE BOX & THREE-TOED BOX © JOEL SARTORE

» COOL TURTLE TRIVIA

- **MALES HAVE LONG TOENAILS** on their front feet to use when courting females. The males swim backwards in front of females and fan water over their faces. This makes the females think they're handsome.
- **IN MANY NATIVE AMERICAN** stories about how the world began, the land on which they lived was on the back of a huge turtle floating in the sea.
- **A TURTLE'S SHELL IS MADE UP** of its ribs joined together and covered with a thin layer of skin. Each rib is made of jigsaw-like sections called scutes, which grow at the edges so the turtle won't outgrow its shell.



ILLUSTRATIONS © FAN ARROYO



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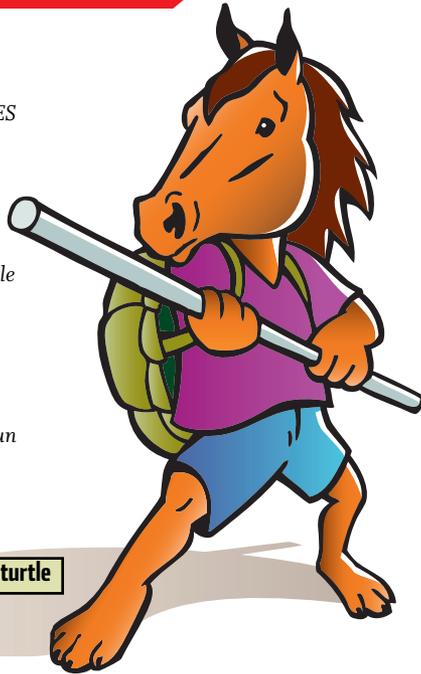


Spike's Activity Page

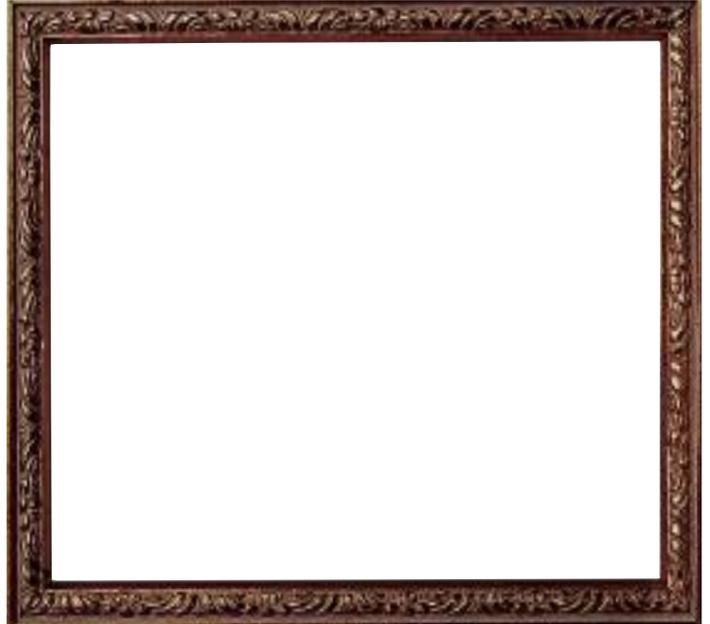


>> WILD ART

SOME TURTLES HAVE NAMES that describe how they look: leatherback, loggerhead, hawksbill, three-toed box, red-eared slider. Make up a new, imaginary species of turtle with a descriptive name: monkey ears, polka-dot shell, sparkly unicorn or whatever you like. Draw a picture of your new turtle. Write some fun facts for your new turtle, too!



Horsehead turtle



>> KEEPING IT WILD

SOME SEA TURTLES MISTAKE plastic grocery bags for a favorite food, jellyfish. Eating these bags can make the turtles sick. Even when we think we throw away a bag carefully, it can still end up in lakes, rivers and oceans. What can you do to use fewer plastic bags? Maybe you could buy a few cloth bags and reuse them when you go shopping. What can you do to help friends and family use fewer plastic bags? You could put up posters at your school, church or local grocery store.

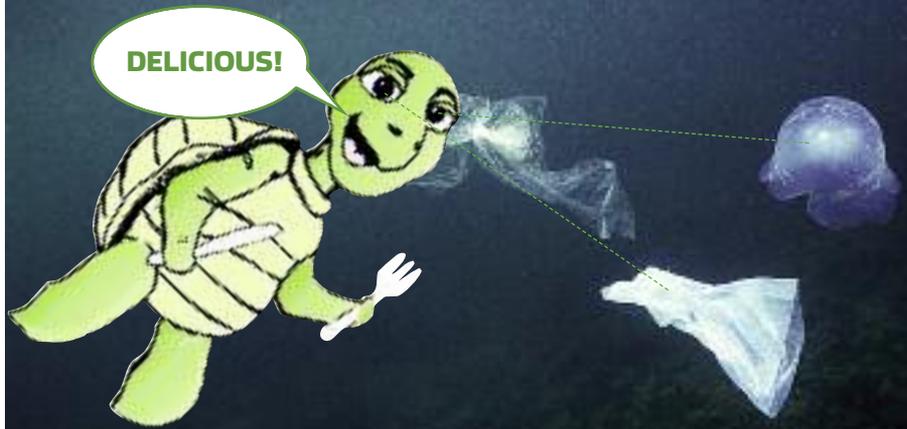


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>> WILD MATH



ASK YOUR MOM OR DAD how many plastic bags your family uses each week when they buy food and other items. Multiply that number by 52 (the number of weeks in a year) to find out how many bags your family uses each year. You can take it even farther by multiplying that number by the number of students in your school or the people in your town.

NEXT MONTH: Saving water for wildlife



TEACHER RESOURCE

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