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.

> TURTLE POWER!

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

The most common aquatic turtle in Texas is the red-eared slider. The “red” is for the red stripes 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!

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.

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.

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.

Texas parks & wildlife
Sea 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.

The most common aquatic turtle in Texas is the red-eared slider. The “red” is for the red stripes 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!

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.

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 bears sea sponges to help with its hard-to-break diet. They have been prized for their beautiful shells. The green turtle is friendly to scuba divers. The green color comes from the algae they like to eat.

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 egg hatches 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.

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.

FRESHWATER TURTLES

THE MOST COMMON aquatic turtle in Texas is the RED-EARED SLIDER. The “red” is for the red stripes 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!

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.
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!

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.

**WILD MATH**

**ASK YOUR MOM OR DAD how many plastic bags your family uses each week when they buy food and other items. Multiple 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 further by multiplying that number by the number of students in your school or the people in your town.**

**TEACHER RESOURCE**

Visit www.tpwdmagazine.com to download a printable PDF, access lesson plans, find additional resources or order copies.

**Houston, We Have a Problem**

It may sound like science fiction, but it’s true. A new exotic insect species, the Rasberry crazy ant, has invaded 11 counties in the Houston area since pest control operator Tom Rasberry discovered the ants in Pasadena in 2002. By 2008 they had spread to Brazoria, Fort Bend, Galveston, Hardin, Harris, Jefferson, Liberty, Montgomery, Orange, Walker, and Wharton counties, and they’re being found in an ever-widening area.

- At this time, the only way to control these ants is through professional pest control. Fire ant baits and other home pesticides are generally ineffective.
- As they continue to invade, Rasberry crazy ants decrease home and property values and could impact agriculture — both livestock and crops. Their activity has damaged electrical equipment and could affect computer systems, traffic signals, businesses, schools, airports, and hospitals.
- Until better control methods are developed, you can help by identifying crazy ant colonies and discouraging these ants from nesting in the landscape.

Here’s What You Can Do

- Report suspicious ant problems in your landscape, and have ants identified by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service.
- Do not move infested articles — such as containerized landscape plants, lumber, and yard waste — to uninfested areas.
- If your property is infested, remove all nonessential objects from the ground to discourage nesting.
- Avoid feeding the ants by eliminating food sources, which can include honeydew-producing landscape pests such as aphids, scales, and mealybugs.

For more information, visit: [http://UrbanEntomology.tamu.edu](http://UrbanEntomology.tamu.edu)

**About Rasberry Crazy Ants**

- They are similar to the Caribbean crazy ant, a serious pest in parts of Florida, but differ in their size and colony behavior.
- About ⅛ inch long, reddish brown, and nest throughout the landscape. Queens, eggs, larvae, and pupae can be found under, or in, almost any object. Entire colony will move to a new site when disturbed. Multiple queens lay hundreds of eggs, so colonies often contain millions of ants.
- Spread mainly by ground migration, not by mating flights. Can be spread by almost any ant-infested container or vehicle.
- May bite, but don’t produce a painful sting. Displace other ant species and could affect wildlife such as honeybees and songbirds.

**Partners in Prevention**

This information was developed on behalf of the Crazy Ant Task Force members from the following agencies and organizations:

- Texas A&M University Department of Entomology, Texas AgriLife Extension Service, and Texas AgriLife Research
- U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Plant Protection and Quarantine
- Agricultural Research Service
- Texas Department of Agriculture
- Texas Department of Transportation
- Texas Parks and Wildlife
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife
- Texas Nursery and Landscape Association
- Pest Budget Control

This is a public service announcement from the Texas AgriLife Extension Service. Educational programs of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin. [http://AgriLifeExtension.tamu.edu](http://AgriLifeExtension.tamu.edu)

For more information, visit: [http://UrbanEntomology.tamu.edu](http://UrbanEntomology.tamu.edu)