

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Reptiles and Amphibians

*Chincoteague
National
Wildlife Refuge*



Although reptiles and amphibians are often less visible than the other wildlife that grace Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, they make up an important part of the ecosystem. Their habitats are as varied as the refuge itself, some preferring the freshwater ponds, others taking to the sandy dunes. Please remember to respect the homes of these fascinating animals and stay on the designated trails.

Reptiles

Reptiles are cold-blooded, dry-skinned vertebrates that usually have scaly skin and typically lay shelled eggs on land. Reptiles consist of animals such as turtles and snakes.

Turtles

Snapping Turtle
(*Chelydra serpentina*), Common, 8–18", 10–45 pounds. Found in freshwater impoundments, snapping turtles are black to light brown, and are easily recognized by their large heads and saw-toothed ridges along their tails and back of their shells. These turtles can usually be found buried in the mud and are known for their short temper and willingness to strike if provoked.



Snapping turtle. Photo: Michael Colopy.

*Cover: Fowler's toad.
Photo: Irene Hinke
Sacilotto.*

Northern diamondback terrapin



Eastern painted turtle



Eastern Mud Turtle (*Kinosternon subrubrum*), Common, 3–5". This mainly aquatic turtle is found in freshwater impoundments and marshes. The Eastern mud turtle is aptly named after its muddy, brown-black appearance. The turtle's head is spotted or streaked with yellow; however, the mud turtle is rarely seen because it hides by day and forages underwater at night.

Northern Diamondback Terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin*), Common, Female 6–10", Male 4–6". The Northern diamondback terrapin is found in brackish water and salt marshes, often basking on mud flats. This turtle's shell shows deep growth rings which give it a sculpted appearance. The shell's coloration is variable and the head and limbs are peppered with black.

Eastern Box Turtle (*Terrapene carolina*), Uncommon, 4–8". The Eastern box turtle is mainly a land turtle, but sometimes soaks in freshwater ponds. This high-domed shell turtle has the ability to close its back end tight, which gives it a boxed appearance. Variable in color and patterns, the box turtle can be yellow, orange, olive, black, or brown.

Eastern Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta*), Common, 4–7". The Eastern painted turtle is found in freshwater impoundments, often basking in the sun. This attractive turtle has a smooth black shell with yellow and red markings and yellow lines and spots on the head.

Northern diamondback terrapin. Photo: Irene Hinke Sacilotto.

Eastern painted turtle. Photo: Michael Colopy.



Red-bellied turtle. Photo: T.E. Graham, USFWS.

Red-bellied Turtle
(*Chrysemys rubriventris*),
Uncommon, 10–13". Often seen
basking with the painted turtles,
the red-bellied turtle has a brown-
black shell. The females can be
distinguished from the males by the
vertical red lines down their back.

Atlantic Loggerhead (sea turtle)
(*Caretta caretta*), Uncommon,
30–70", 170–900 pounds. The Atlantic
loggerhead is a reddish-brown sea
turtle that is occasionally seen
surfacing in channels and in Toms
Cove. This turtle has paddle like
limbs and an elongated, heart-shaped
shell. Listed as a threatened species.

Snakes

No venomous snakes exist
on the refuge.

Brown Water Snake
(*Nerodia taxispilota*), Uncommon,
30–70". The brown water snake is
found in freshwater ponds and
ditches and is an excellent tree
climber. This snake has a head wider
than its neck and is dark brown with
large dark splotches down its back.

Northern Water Snake
(*Nerodia sipedon*), Rare, 22–53".
The Northern water snake is found
in freshwater ponds or basking on
logs on the water's edge. This snake
can be reddish, brown, or gray to
brownish-black with dark crossbands
on the neck region and blotches on
the back and side.

Rough Green Snake
(*Opheodryx aestivus*), Rare, 22–45".
A tree dweller found in vines, bushes,
and trees near water, the rough
green snake is very slender and
pea-green in color with a white to
yellowish-green belly.

Eastern Garter Snake
(*Thamnophis sirtalis*), Rare, 18–52".
The Eastern garter snake is highly
variable in color, with stripes or spots
dominating. Occasionally some garter
snakes are all black. Beware, when
these snakes are handled they expel
a pungent musk.



Garter snake. Photo: ©Photodisc.



Eastern hognose snake. Photo: Irvin Ailes, USFWS.

Eastern Hognose Snake
(*Heterodon platyrhinos*), Common, 18–45". The Eastern hognose snake is stout-bodied with a pointed, slightly upturned snout and wide neck. The coloration of this snake is highly variable, but it usually has dark blotches on its back. The hognose snake is best known for the defensive behavior of “hooding” its neck, flattening its body and hissing. If this fails to elude the predator, the Eastern hognose rolls over and plays dead.

Black Rat Snake
(*Elaphe obsoleta*), Common, 34–100". This long, powerful constrictor is shiny black with a white chin and belly. The black rat snake is an excellent climber and often resides in high tree cavities.

Black Racer
(*Coluber constrictor*), Common, 34–77". The black racer is a long, slender, agile and fast moving snake. What may seem to be the buzzing of a rattlesnake is actually the black racer vibrating its tail tip in dead vegetation. If grabbed, this snake may bite repeatedly and thrash about.



Black rat snake. Photo: Robert Wilson, USFWS.

Amphibians

Amphibians are cold-blooded vertebrates that usually lack scaly skin, lay jelly-coated eggs in water, and go through metamorphosis (a change in physical appearance). This group of animals consists of toads, frogs, and salamanders.

Toads

Fowler’s Toad
(*Bufo woodhousii fowleri*). Common, 2.5–5". The Fowler’s toad is found in sandy areas, on trails, and around buildings. This large toad has dry, warty skin that is yellow, green or brown in color. The back of the Fowler’s toad is blotchy while the chest is paler and unspotted.

Frogs

Green Treefrog
(*Hyla cinerea*), Common, 1–2.5". The green treefrog prefers moist shady places. This little frog has smooth bright green, yellow, or greenish-gray skin with a yellowish stripe along side of the body. They often congregate in large groups of several hundreds and tend to rest during the day.



Green treefrog. Photo: Hollingsworth, USFWS.



Bullfrog. Photo: Irene Hinke Sacilotto

Southern Leopard Frog
(*Rana sphenoccephala*), Common, 2–5". The Southern leopard frog can be found in freshwater ponds and brackish marshes, but forages on land. This nocturnal frog is slender and green to brown in color with variable spots.

Bullfrog
(*Rana catesbeiana*), Common, 3.5–8". The largest frog in North America, the bullfrog is an introduced species at the refuge. This frog is found in freshwater ponds and has green to yellowish skin with occasional gray or brown markings.

Salamanders

Redback Salamander
(*Plethodon cinereus*), Rare, 2–5". The redback salamander is dark gray or black with a reddish stripe along its back. This salamander prefers the dark, moist areas under rocks and leaf litter in the forest.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Chincoteague is one of over 500 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System administered by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. The National Wildlife Refuge System is a network of lands and waters managed specifically for the protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat and represents the most comprehensive wildlife resource management program in the world. Units of the system stretch across the United States from northern Alaska to the Florida Keys and include small islands in the Caribbean and South Pacific. The habitat of refuges is as diverse as the nation itself.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service also manages National Fish Hatcheries, and provides federal leadership in habitat protection, fish and wildlife research, technical assistance and the conservation and protection of migratory birds, certain marine mammals and threatened and endangered species.

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