

What should you do when you find a turtle? Details matter.

When you find a turtle, often you hear to just, “Let it go where you found it,” or to help it cross the road in the direction it was headed. That’s good advice in most cases, but turtles and life aren’t always so simple.

- What kind is it? Is it native to your state and county? If you’re uncertain what kind of turtle it is, email a picture to your local turtle or herpetological society or try Turtle Identification on Facebook; include the city & state or at least county and state where found.
- Is it sick or injured? Does it look “different” from what you’re used to seeing, such as an oddly shaped shell or very long beak or nails?
- In what habitat was it found? Was it found in or near forest, farmland, grassy field, inner city park, or crossing a neighborhood road? On a back deck above ground? Is there water nearby, such as a bog/fen, marshland, pond, or creek?
- What time of year is it? Is it late fall, late spring, early summer, or winter?
- What size is it? Hatchling, juvenile, or adult? If adult, is it female or male?

What would you do in the following scenarios?



Mid-Atlantic Turtle & Tortoise Society

A. You just found this in a state park in Virginia, USA.
What should you do?

- 1) Let it go where you found it.
Turtles belong in the wild.
- 2) Take it to the park office.
- 3) Keep it as a pet (if you can
provide proper care).



Mid-Atlantic Turtle & Tortoise Society

B. You just found this turtle in a dried-up wetland in Frostburg, Maryland, USA. What should you do?

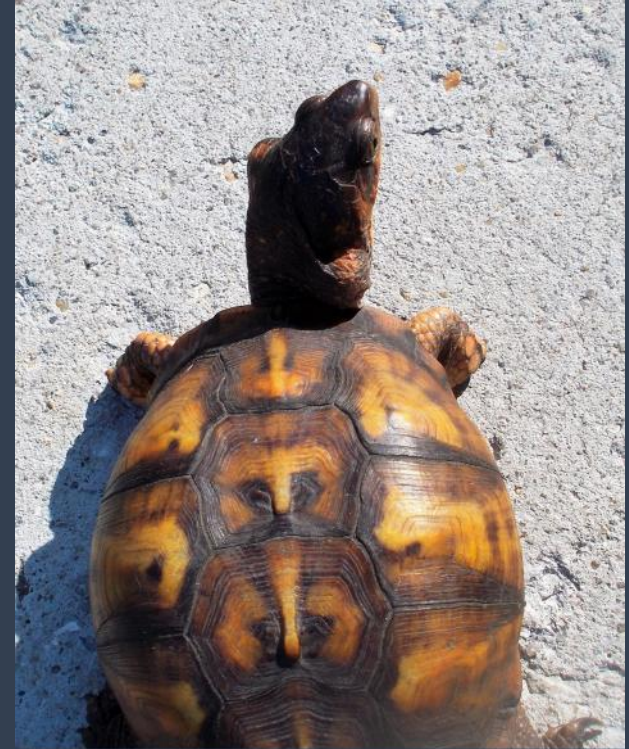
- 1) Let it go where you found it. Turtles know where they belong.
- 2) Send pictures to an experienced ID group before deciding.
- 3) Contact a local animal control, humane society, or reptile rescue.
- 4) Keep it as a pet (if you are able to provide proper care).



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C. You just found this crossing a road in a rural area of Maryland, USA. What should you do?

- 1) Let it go where you found it, in the direction it was heading. The turtle knows where it should go.
- 2) Take it to a licensed wildlife rehabber or qualified veterinarian familiar with treating turtles. Make certain the rehabber or vet knows exactly where it was found.
- 3) Take it home to be a pet.



Mid-Atlantic Turtle & Tortoise Society

D. You just found this in a city park in Pennsylvania, USA.
What should you do?

- 1) Let it go where you found it.
- 2) Take it to the local animal shelter or reptile rescue.
- 3) Take it to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator.
- 4) Take it home to be a pet but contact animal control to see if someone reported it missing.



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E. You just found this crossing the road in Maryland in a neighborhood near Washington, DC, USA.
What should you do?

- 1) Let it go where you found it, in the direction it was heading.
- 2) Take it to the local animal shelter or reptile rescue.
- 3) Take it to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator.



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F. You just found this baby at the edge of a pond in California, USA.
What should you do?

- 1) Let it go where you found it.
- 2) Take it to the local animal shelter, state wildlife agency, or reptile rescue.
- 3) Keep it as a pet (if you have the space and means to take care of a turtle).



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G. You just found this turtle on the sidewalk in front of your house in Maryland, USA. What should you do?

- 1) Let it go where you found it.
- 2) Take it to the local animal shelter, state wildlife agency, or reptile rescue.
- 3) Keep it as a pet (if you have the space and means to take care of a turtle).



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H. You just found this on your porch in New Jersey, USA.
What should you do?

- 1) Let it go where you found it in your yard.
- 2) Let it go to the nearest slow-moving body of water that has aquatic vegetation.
- 3) Take it to the local animal shelter, state wildlife agency, or reptile rescue.
- 4) Keep it as a pet (if you have the space and means to take care of a turtle).



Mid-Atlantic Turtle & Tortoise Society

- I. You just found this turtle crossing the road in late May in South Carolina, USA. What should you do?
 - 1) Help it across the road, letting it go on the other side of the road in the direction it was heading.
 - 2) Let it go to the nearest slow-moving body of water that has aquatic vegetation.
 - 3) Take it to the local animal shelter, state wildlife agency, or reptile rescue.
 - 4) Keep it as a pet (if you have the space and means to take care of a turtle).



Mid-Atlantic Turtle & Tortoise Society

A. You just found this in a state park in Virginia, USA. You should...

1) DO NOT let it go. Take it to the park office.

This is a Russian tortoise *Agrionemys [Testudo] horsfieldii*, which is NOT native to the US. It's a dumped pet, since it was found inside of a state park.



Most Russians in the US are wild-caught imports, and some come in with the diseases chelonian herpes or mycoplasma, which can affect our box turtles. This should never be “returned to the wild” if found outside of an enclosure.



Mid-Atlantic Turtle & Tortoise Society

B. You just found this turtle in a dried-up wetland in Frostburg, Maryland, USA. You should...

Answer: 2, 3, or 4.

First, send pictures to an experienced ID group before making a decision.

Then either contact a local animal control, humane society, or reptile rescue, or keep it as a pet (if you are able to provide proper care). You should try to locate an owner if possible but likely this was dumped rather than escaped based on where it was found.

This is an African mud turtle, *Pelusios castaneus*, which is not native to the US. It's a dumped or escaped pet. It CANNOT survive the frigid winter of western Maryland.

Most African sideneck turtles in the US are wild-caught imports. This should never be "returned to the wild" if found outside of an enclosure.



Mid-Atlantic Turtle & Tortoise Society

C. You just found this crossing a road in a rural area of Maryland, USA. You should...

- 2) Take it to a licensed wildlife rehabber or qualified veterinarian familiar with treating turtles. Make certain the rehabber or vet knows exactly where it was found so it can be returned to the wild after treatment. You can use **ahnow.org** to help find a rehabber or vet.

This is an eastern box turtle, *Terrapene carolina Carolina* which IS native to Maryland, but it has two abscesses that need veterinary attention (likely surgery under anesthesia and injectable antibiotics). These abscesses could eventually kill the turtle by affecting the head bones or get so large that the turtle is unable to pull the head into the shell. Once the turtle has been treated, a rehabber would release it where it was found. In many states it would be illegal to take this one home to be a pet, but you could be helping local populations by getting it to a rehabber so it can be treated.



Mid-Atlantic Turtle & Tortoise Society

D. You just found this in a city park in Pennsylvania.
You should either...

- 1) Take it to the local animal shelter or reptile rescue or
- 2) Contact a licensed wildlife rehabilitator or
- 3) Take it home to be a pet, but contact animal control to see if someone reported it missing.

This is a desert box turtle, *Terrapene ornata*.

While PA does have native box turtles, those are eastern box turtles, *T. carolina carolina*. The pictured turtle is an escaped or dumped pet and does NOT belong in the wild in PA. Also notice that he has slight pyramiding and a slightly overgrown beak, which is another sign it was a long-term pet. While many wildlife rehabilitators cannot accept non-native animals, they might know of a rescue that can take it.



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E. You just found this crossing the road in Maryland in a neighborhood near Washington, DC. You should either...

- 2) Take it to the local animal shelter or reptile rescue, or
- 3) Contact a licensed wildlife rehabilitator.

This is an eastern box turtle, *Terrapene carolina carolina*, which IS native to Maryland. However, by the looks of the overgrown beak, this turtle has been a pet for at least a couple of years (likely more).



In many states it is illegal to release a pet reptile to the wild, even if it is native, if you don't know with what other reptiles it was kept, or the location from which it was originally found in the wild. If it's been in possession for more than a month, permission would be needed from MD DNR to release it. This turtle should NOT be released to the wild.



Mid-Atlantic Turtle & Tortoise Society

F. You just found this baby slider at the edge of a pond in California. You should either...

- 1) Take it to the local animal shelter, state wildlife agency, or reptile rescue or
- 2) Keep it as a pet (if you have the space and means to take care of a turtle).

Sliders (*Trachemys* genus) are not native to California, and could out-compete the state native turtle, the Pacific pond turtle. This turtle should not be in the wild in California.

If this is found in one of the native states such as KY, IN, or MS, release it at the edge of slow-moving water with aquatic vegetation (pond, lake, creek) as close as to where it was found as possible.



Mid-Atlantic Turtle & Tortoise Society

G. You just found this turtle on the sidewalk in front of your house in Maryland.
You should... 1) let it go where found, sort of.

This is a baby eastern box turtle (*Terrapene carolina carolina*). Most turtle species don't raise their young; the babies hatch ready to take care of themselves and they usually hatch in the fall or early spring right after a heavy rain. This turtle is native to Maryland, but a sidewalk or neighborhood lawn isn't a good place for it, because a predator or another person could easily find it. It's also probably too dry.

Babies need it very humid so the best bet would be to place it in the nearest woods at least 100ft from the edge up against a log under damp leaf litter or under damp leaf litter in a bramble thicket as close to where it was found as possible. If it appears dehydrated, you can let it soak in ½ inch of room temperature water for half an hour, then release. If it appears injured, contact a state licensed rehabber. You can use ahnow.org to find a rehabber. **It is illegal in many states to keep native turtles or at least wild native turtles.**



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H. You just found this on your porch in New Jersey.
You should either... 1) release it in your yard or 2) Let it go to the nearest slow-moving body of water that has aquatic vegetation

This is a common snapping turtle hatchling, native to NJ. The mom probably dug a nest in the mulch in your garden in the late spring or early summer. After it hatched, a bird may have picked it up and dropped it on your porch. While you can legally keep one in NJ, it's best to let it go to be a wild turtle, since these get HUGE and many wild turtle populations are in trouble.

Let it go next to the CLOSEST slow-moving body of water that has aquatic vegetation. If it appears dehydrated, you can let it soak in ½ inch of room temperature water for half an hour, then release at the edge of the water, so it has time to rehydrate before having to swim. If it appears injured, contact a state licensed rehabber. You can use ahnow.org to find a rehabber.



Mid-Atlantic Turtle & Tortoise Society

I. You just found this turtle crossing the road in late May in South Carolina, USA. You should...

- 1) Help it across the road, letting it go on the other side of the road in the direction it was heading.



This is a female yellowbellied slider, native to SC. If it's late spring or summer, she's probably going to lay eggs. If there's water nearby, she knows where she wants to go to dig a nest and will return to her pond when she's done. If she's injured, you can use ahnow.org to try to find a licensed SC wildlife rehabber and keep her inside in a box with a towel in a dark, quiet place until she can get to a rehabber.



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