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# TURTLE TIDINGS

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THE NEW HAMPSHIRE TURTLE RESCUE 2024 ANNUAL REPORT



**NEW HAMPSHIRE**  
**TURTLE RESCUE**

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## PREFACE

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We had a very active and productive year at New Hampshire Turtle Rescue! It has been nothing short of extraordinary for our team and the turtles we hold dear. From carrying out a deluge of rescues to conducting novel research, we've made significant strides in our mission to protect and preserve New Hampshire's native turtle species. We hope you'll enjoy reading about all we've accomplished in 2024!

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## PATIENT INTAKES

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We **admitted 149 patients** from **59 towns** across New Hampshire, comprising every native turtle species except for the Eastern Box Turtle. A summary of our 2024 intakes can be found in Table 1. In addition, we responded to countless phone calls and messages asking for turtle advice, including many calls about pet turtle rehoming. There are currently around 60 patients overwintering with us until it gets warm enough to return them home this upcoming spring.

TABLE 1: NEW HAMPSHIRE TURTLE RESCUE 2024 PATIENT INTAKES

Common Name	Species Name	Intakes
Blanding's Turtle*	<i>Emydoidea blandingii</i>	20
Spotted Turtle†	<i>Clemmys guttata</i>	12
Wood Turtle‡	<i>Glyptemys insculpta</i>	4
Eastern Painted Turtle	<i>Chrysemys picta picta</i>	91
Common Snapping Turtle	<i>Chelydra serpentina</i>	20
Eastern Musk Turtle	<i>Sternotherus odoratus</i>	2
<b>Total Intakes</b>		<b>149</b>

Injuries presented by patients were overwhelmingly due to car strikes. Other trauma occurring in much lower frequencies included dog attacks, embedded fishing hooks, suspected bird drops, compromised nests, and others.

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## PATIENT RELEASES

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A significant number of patients from 2023 (and even a couple of remaining 2022 intakes) needed to be overwintered with us and were released during the spring and summer of 2024, giving us a very full release calendar throughout the warm months. Planning and carrying out releases takes a lot of time and careful research to get right; nonetheless, we managed to **release 94 patients** back to their wild homes in **43 towns** across New Hampshire. You can see two of these now-released patients pictured in Figure 1; a summary of our releases is given in Table 2. We wish them all long, peaceful, and reproductive lives!

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\* State Endangered; listed as Critically Imperiled (S1)

† State Threatened; listed as Imperiled (S2)

‡ State Species of Special Concern; listed as Vulnerable to Extirpation and Extinction



FIGURE 1: TWO CAR STRIKE VICTIMS HEALED AND READY FOR RELEASE BACK TO THEIR HOMES. (LEFT) MYRNA, AN ADULT FEMALE BLANDING’S TURTLE. (RIGHT) TRILLIUM, A JUVENILE MALE WOOD TURTLE.

TABLE 2: NEW HAMPSHIRE TURTLE RESCUE 2024 PATIENT RELEASES

Common Name	Species Name	Releases
Blanding’s Turtle*	<i>Emydoidea blandingii</i>	27
Spotted Turtle†	<i>Clemmys guttata</i>	7
Wood Turtle‡	<i>Glyptemys insculpta</i>	3
Eastern Painted Turtle	<i>Chrysemys picta picta</i>	44
Common Snapping Turtle	<i>Chelydra serpentina</i>	12
Eastern Musk Turtle	<i>Sternotherus odoratus</i>	1
<b>Total Releases</b>		<b>94</b>

## RESIDENT TURTLE INTAKES AND STATUS

A few new residents also joined us this past year: three Blanding’s Turtles, two Spotted Turtles, an Eastern Painted Turtle, and an Alligator Snapping Turtle. Aside from the Alligator Snapping Turtle, all these turtles were kidnapped from the wild and kept as pets for an extended amount of time, often with other non-native turtles, making the potential for release very unlikely. The Alligator Snapping Turtle is a non-native turtle that was kept as a pet and surrendered to NH Fish & Game, who asked us to care for it until it can be placed with an appropriately equipped facility long-term. Our current resident cohort is split into state-listed species requiring a permit to possess (Table 3) and non-listed/non-native species (Table 4).

TABLE 3: NEW HAMPSHIRE TURTLE RESCUE 2024 STATE-LISTED RESIDENTS

Common Name	Species Name	Residents
Blanding’s Turtle*	<i>Emydoidea blandingii</i>	4
Eastern Box Turtle*	<i>Terrapene carolina carolina</i>	2
Spotted Turtle†	<i>Clemmys guttata</i>	2
<b>Total State-Listed Residents</b>		<b>8</b>

TABLE 4: NEW HAMPSHIRE TURTLE RESCUE 2024 NON-LISTED AND NON-NATIVE RESIDENTS

Common Name	Species Name	Residents
Eastern Painted Turtle	<i>Chrysemys picta picta</i>	2
Eastern Musk Turtle	<i>Sternotherus odoratus</i>	4
Three-Toed Box Turtle	<i>Terrapene triunguis</i>	2
Ornate Box Turtle	<i>Terrapene ornata ornata</i>	1
Alligator Snapping Turtle	<i>Macrochelys temminckii</i>	1
<b>Total Non-Listed and Non-Native Residents</b>		<b>10</b>

As the only facility in NH permitted to receive and possess Blanding’s, Spotted, Wood, and Eastern Box Turtles, we have no choice but to take them in when we are presented with non-releasable pet situations. The influx of state-listed residents this year has strained our resident capacity. Residents are kept on a different floor of the facility which is completely separated from the patients in the clinic for biosecurity reasons. This limited non-clinic resident space has now become totally filled. We are also preparing for two ambassador Blanding’s and Wood Turtles to be transferred to us to join our residents this spring.

NHTR is currently considering the rehomeing or long-term fostering of some non-listed aquatic residents (Musk Turtles, Painted Turtles, and Alligator Snapping Turtle). If you know of a potential rehomeing or fostering opportunity, please get in touch with us!

## AMBASSADORS

Some of the non-releasable residents at NHTR serve as species ambassadors to help foster deeper connections with the public when educating them on how to be good neighbors to turtles and the importance of preserving wetlands. Our currently appointed ambassadors include two Eastern Box Turtles, one Blanding’s Turtle, and one Spotted Turtle.

Elvira, an ambassador Blanding’s Turtle (Figure 2), is growing like a weed and recovering surprisingly well from the extreme deformities and emaciation she suffered as a hatchling before being surrendered to NH Fish & Game and transferred to us in May 2023 to attempt to nurse her back to health. She has become



FIGURE 2: TWO OF NEW HAMPSHIRE TURTLE RESCUE’S AMBASSADORS. (LEFT) ELVIRA THE BLANDING’S TURTLE. (RIGHT) RASI THE SPOTTED TURTLE.



incredibly personable, curious, and relatively unstressed by human presence, helping her transition into her ambassador role seamlessly.

Our other new ambassador is Rasi the Spotted Turtle. Rasi is an adult female who was kidnapped from the wild and kept in an aquarium without any basking platform, heat, or UV lamps for over a decade! Unfortunately, Rasi's exact home location is unknown and her time in captivity increased her risk of exposure to dangerous pathogens, making her return to the wild all but impossible. She is a bit shy around humans, but very curious otherwise and spends a lot of her time taking advantage of her new luxurious custom over-the-tank basking platform. You can witness her bliss and splendor yourself in Figure 2!

We will also be receiving an adult Wood and Blanding's turtle this spring. They are experienced longtime ambassadors who need to be rehomed by our mentor, a retired NH turtle rehabilitator.

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## EASTERN BOX TURTLE HEADSTARTING PROGRAM

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This is the third year we have worked with Zoo New England's Field Conservation Department and NH Fish & Game to headstart hatchlings from the few known and monitored breeding populations of critically endangered Eastern Box Turtles in New Hampshire. Turtle headstarting is a conservation technique where young turtles are raised in a controlled environment to increase their survival rates before being released back into the wild. This method is meant to help bolster endangered or threatened turtle populations by protecting them during their most vulnerable stages.

In June 2024 the last three individuals from our first cohort of headstarts were released into their population with radio trackers attached to their shells to continue monitoring their activities and survival rates over time. The first individual from that cohort released in 2023, named Ari, was crushed and killed by Eversource utility trucks clearing brush along the power lines only a week after the turtle was placed with its wild population. Multiple critically endangered Eastern Box Turtles were killed during this preventable mortality event, including an adult breeding female. It is possible that this population is no longer viable and will be unable to recover from this tragedy; only time will tell.



FIGURE 3: (LEFT) ZOO NEW ENGLAND AND NH FISH & GAME STAFF ATTACH TRACKERS AND TAKE FINAL MEASUREMENTS BEFORE THE HEADSTARTED EASTERN BOX TURTLES ARE RELEASED. (RIGHT) ONE OF NHTR'S HEADSTARTED JUVENILES IN THE WILD.

We also received a new cohort of four hatchlings from a different NH population in September 2024. It's always amazing to witness how quickly they grow and watch their personalities develop. They've already gotten so big that their enclosure space has been doubled to accommodate their rapid growth! We're looking forward to giving them the opportunity to live the free and wild lives that they deserve.

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## POST-RELEASE RADIO TELEMETRY TRACKING

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One of NHTR's research programs involves tracking rehabilitated turtles after release to collect data on their outcomes and better inform rehabilitation and release protocols. There is very little available research in this field; improving our understanding of post-release outcomes could have wide-ranging implications for turtle rehabilitation. This program is in collaboration with the University of New Hampshire under a scientific research permit issued by New Hampshire Fish & Game.

Our first tracked patient was a Spotted Turtle released in August 2023. We were able to track her to the base of a tree on a hummock in the middle of a vernal pool during winter, where we suspect she was brumating until it warmed back up in the spring. Unfortunately, by the time the vernal pool thawed in the spring of 2024, the tracker battery had become depleted, and her signal was lost. We will attempt to recapture her with NH Fish & Game's help in the spring of 2025 in order to remove the useless radio tag from her shell.

Two adult female Blanding's turtles from different populations were also included in our tracking program. The trackers on both of these individuals detached a short distance from their release locations. No evidence of depredation was observed, nor any indication that something else occurred aside from the



FIGURE 4: NHTR FIELD WORK WITH VOLUNTEER JOHN HOMING IN ON A RADIO-TAGGED WOOD TURTLE WHO WAS REHABILITATED AND RELEASED EARLIER IN THE YEAR.



trackers detaching as the turtles moved through thick vegetation. These misfortunes could be due to a bad batch of adhesives or poor application of them. We have updated our tracker attachment protocols and replaced our supply of adhesives to prevent future detachments.

Currently, we have one Wood Turtle remaining in our tracking program. She seems to be brumating in a river over the winter (Figure 4); we are hoping to catch up with her again in the spring to see how things are going for her.

Because of the multiple tracker mishaps we experienced during the year, little scientific information was gained from our research program in 2024. We are using these lessons to update and improve our protocols so that we can ensure a much more successful program in 2025.

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## FACILITY IMPROVEMENTS

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A few notable improvements have been made to our facility and clinic. One of our biggest struggles coming out of 2023 was the need for additional space to hold patients, especially large snapping turtles. We also improved upon aspects of our medical and husbandry practices.

We have purchased a 14'x30' aluminum and polycarbonate greenhouse kit as an overflow space for patients during the warm months. This new expansion will allow us to accommodate many more patients when our clinic space becomes full. The greenhouse site is currently being prepared and will be in service by the 2025 rehab season this spring.

A local member of the Boy Scouts of America constructed a pair of outdoor enclosures to fulfil his community service project requirement for earning his Eagle Scout badge (see Figure 5). His troop joined him over a couple of days to prepare the site and put together some very sturdy and aesthetically pleasing



FIGURE 5: SCOUTS HARD AT WORK ON NEW AMBASSADOR ENCLOSURES UNDER EXPERT SUPERVISION.



FIGURE 6: PATIENTS DEEP ASLEEP IN THE COMFORT OF THEIR CUSTOM ENCLOSED BASKING PLATFORMS. (LEFT) PLUM, BLANDING'S TURTLE. (RIGHT) SORBUS, SPOTTED TURTLE.

new homes for our ambassadors during the spring and summer. It was a great learning experience for everybody involved.

Indoors, our clinic space was upgraded with a large run of networking cables to support adding power-over-ethernet security cameras to every patient enclosure. Cameras allow us to remotely observe patient behaviors to assess health and monitor for situations where timely intervention is necessary, such as a patient laying eggs or a patient unable to get up after being flipped over.

Viewing patient behavior when humans aren't around is by far the most significant advantage of our networked camera upgrade. Patients with trauma tend to be incredibly withdrawn, both physically and in demeanor, which becomes amplified in the presence of humans. Understanding the extent of a patient's injuries and being able to keep track of rehabilitation progress would not be possible without the buildout of our network capacity. Securing funding to purchase cameras for all our patient enclosures will be a top priority in the next year.

We also made custom enclosed basking platforms to sit on top of the stock tanks we use for aquatic habitats. As seen in Figure 6, they provide a sheltered and safe area for turtles to bask and dry off – a key process in promoting shedding to maintain shell health. Wild turtles tend to be very skittish and reactive to human presence; the design of these basking platforms keeps people out of sight, thereby decreasing stress.

The NHTR wildlife emergency line was also upgraded and moved to a more reliable carrier; it is now on its own dedicated line and is much more reliable. We installed a dedicated phone system at the facility that works with the new phone line to improve response time and dependability.

## EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

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We were only able to accommodate a couple of education programs in 2024 because we were stretched too thinly by clinic and rehab needs. We put on our annual Turtles of New Hampshire program at the Blaisdell Memorial Library in Nottingham, which was a big hit with kids and adults alike. The Town of Sugar Hill's Conservation Commission also invited us to speak with them about the turtles and habitats in their



part of New Hampshire. We always appreciate making new connections with turtle lovers in our community!

A particularly exciting outreach activity was NHTR's involvement in the Birthplace of the Ninja Turtles Gallery opening at the Woodman Museum in Dover, NH. This was the debut of the NHTR education booth, seen in Figure 7. Many of us grew up with Ninja Turtles saturated into the US pop culture of the 80's and 90's, and it was an honor to be invited to represent NHTR at this event and forge a connection between a national media franchise phenomenon and our local phenomenal wildlife.

In addition to those larger events, we participated in some fun interviews and media spotlights. Dallas and Drew were featured in a segment of *What's Wild in New Hampshire* with wildlife biologist Eric Orff. Drew also sat for an interview about turtles and pop culture on the podcast *Everything is a Primary Source* during the Woodman Museum event.

One of our longtime student volunteers was chosen to be featured in a University of New Hampshire episode of *The College Tour* on Amazon Prime and filmed a segment in our clinic to highlight unique local learning and volunteering opportunities available to UNH students. This is also now the third year that our WMUR New Hampshire Chronicle TV segment has been re-aired, playing multiple times throughout 2024 and reminding the public how to give turtles a helping hand.

The public aren't the only ones who benefit from turtle education, either! Dallas was invited by our veterinarian to attend the New England Veterinary Conference in Portland, ME this fall as her guest and sit in on talks about turtle medicine and surgery. Two of our volunteers who are also veterinarians joined them, making the day a great and memorable experience for everyone.



FIGURE 7: THE NHTR BOOTH AT THE WOODMAN MUSEUM IN DOVER, NH.

We were also approached with a fun and unconventional outreach collaboration with Stephen Thorgerson, aka Thor, a local athlete competing in regional and national axe and knife throwing competitions. Thor promotes local organizations and inquired about including the NHTR logo on his official competition jersey, which we thought it was a really sharp idea! Go get 'em, Thor!

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## OUR TURTLE TEAM

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The resilient spirit of New Hampshire Turtle Rescue has been cultivated through the relentless dedication of our team and emerges from the blood, sweat, and tears shed through many long days and countless hours spent nurturing our cherished turtle populations.

In particular, we would like to recognize the dedicated volunteers who donate their time to help us care for our patients and residents week after week, as well as the volunteers in our transport network who help to get injured turtles to our clinic from all over the state. All of their selfless contributions make a world of difference for the turtles of New Hampshire!

One of the biggest developments for our team over the past year was initiating an internship program for college students during the summer break. These months tend to be some of our busiest and when we need consistent, reliable help. We recruited two students, Regan and Jacob, from the University of New Hampshire who worked with us full-time from late May through the end of August.

These two interns made a huge impact on our rehabilitation efforts; we trained them in researching appropriate release spots based on the location the turtle was found using GIS software and carrying out the patient releases themselves. We were able to return rehabilitated patients back to their homes at a



FIGURE 8: DALLAS, DREW, AND VOLUNTEER DANIEL PREPARING TO RELEASE DINO THE BLANDING'S TURTLE.



much faster rate thanks to their hard work. We look forward to welcoming a new batch of interns this summer as well.

An Extended Learning Opportunity (ELO) program was organized with Oyster River High School in Durham, NH to allow an interested student to spend some of her school hours with us to learn about wildlife rehabilitation, our native turtles, and environmental conservation. So far the program has been very successful and our student is very engaged in the lessons. We're incredibly fortunate to be able to foster a passion for wild turtles in bright young minds.

We've written multiple letters of recommendation in the past year for some of our high school-aged volunteers' college and scholarship applications – it's easy for us to boast about our volunteers since NHTR has the best! One of our longtime student volunteers wrote an essay about her time with us and was accepted into the prestigious Hamel Scholars Program at the University of New Hampshire.

NHTR was able to hire its first part-time wildlife rehabilitation technician in September to lessen the demands on volunteers and to maintain some steady support after our internships ended. We are working hard to secure the funding to start offering full-time benefitted positions to keep our clinic dependably staffed at all times.

In leadership news, we're thrilled to welcome new members Karen Campbell and Chris Carr to our Board of Directors! Karen and Chris were both early supporters of NHTR and we're very excited to have them get more involved in carrying out our mission.

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## GRATITUDE

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To close out our 2024 Annual Report, we would like to give special thanks to the generous people and organizations who went above and beyond to support New Hampshire Turtle Rescue over the past year:

- The Cove Charitable Trust for their incredibly generous major gift allowing us to expand our rehabilitation space, cover operating costs, and hire a part-time wildlife rehabilitation technician.
- The New Hampshire Charitable Foundation's Hermit Thrush Fund for their continued contribution of major gifts to our programs.
- Crystal Schaaf for her major gifts to support our resident box turtles, including Marigold & Speedy.
- Michael Fraysse for his major gifts throughout the year to support our work.
- Kate Pugliese of Never Not Needle Felting for her needle-felted Spotted Turtle fundraiser on behalf of NHTR.
- Sarah Koff for her box turtle woodblock print (included at the end of this report!) and fundraiser on behalf of NHTR.
- Kevin Talbot for his ongoing support, including a fundraiser for NHTR using his 2025 native NH turtle photo calendar. Kevin rescued the very first turtle that NHTR rehabilitated and released!
- Dr. Samantha Beauchesne, DVM and the Animal Hospital of Barrington for rescuing an injured wood turtle (now healed and released!) and providing discounted radiographs to diagnose the patient.



- Dr. Victoria Jardon, DVM of Mountain Brook Home Veterinary Care for assisting us in providing the best medical care possible to our turtles and for always being there to give us a hand or share her knowledge when we need it.


When we started NHTR in 2022, we were advised that we may get three to five patients in our first couple of years while we established ourselves. At the end of 2024, NHTR had provided support for over 400 turtles in New Hampshire, an accomplishment that we could never have achieved without our intrepid team of turtle heroes.

Thank you for your continued support and providing a ray of hope for the future of New Hampshire's turtles!

Sincerely,

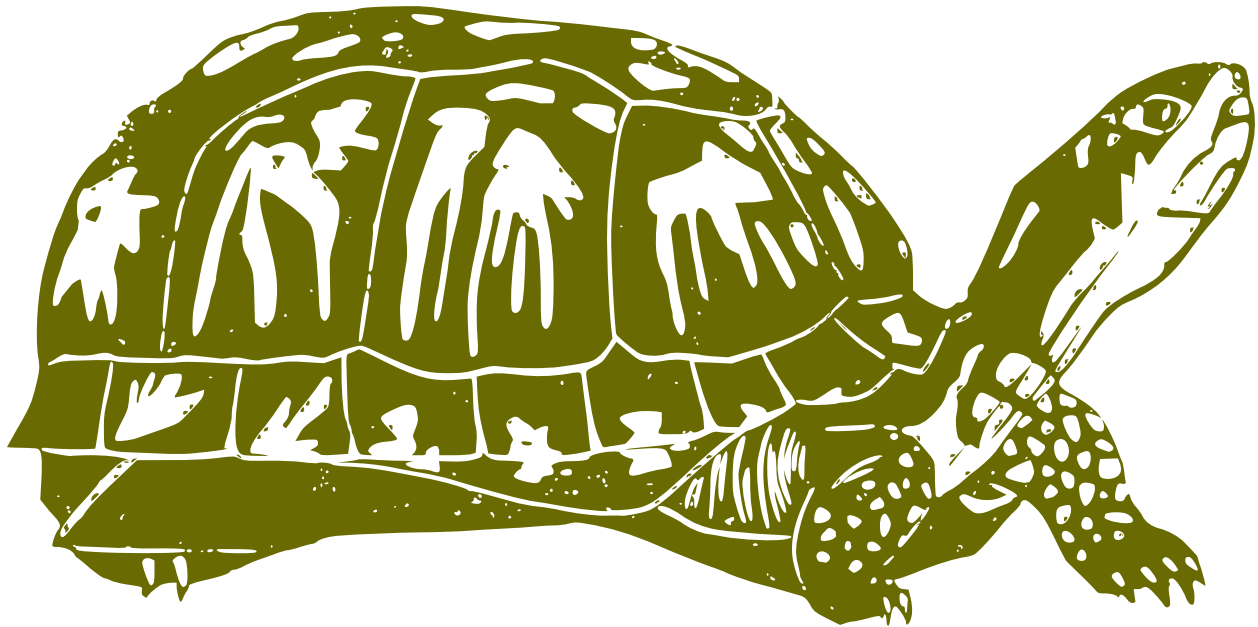


Dallas Huggins, Executive Director



Drew Stevens, President

and the New Hampshire Turtle Rescue Board of Directors: Chris Bogard, Wendy Booth, Karen Campbell, Chris Carr, Sarah Kern, Joshua Megyesy, Jennifer Purrenhage, and David Steinberg.



P.S. If you would like more frequent updates about what we're up to at NHTR, sign up for our newsletter via our website at [www.nhturtlerescue.org](http://www.nhturtlerescue.org)!