

SNAPPING TURTLE



Common Snapping Turtle, *Chelydra serpentina*
looking to bury her eggs. Photo © Dick Harlow

Why tell us about a Snapping Turtle in October. Did I see one?

Yes, in fact Deb Venman brought a baby snapper to me that she found in her back yard. I thought I probably should have written about this in August, but now is better than waiting until next year.

By the end of May and into June Snapping Turtle females start looking for digable soil to deposit their eggs. The above picture is of a female Snapping Turtle *Chelydra serpentina* looking for a likely spot to dig and bury her eggs.



Common Snapping Turtle, *Chelydra serpentina*
disturbance in our garden. Photo © Dick Harlow

The second picture shows where a female snapper tried to dig a hole in our garden here at EastView. However, as far as I know, she was unsuccessful this time; and I'm sure she looked for softer earth elsewhere.

I wasn't sure whether Snappers could be successful with our hard Addison clay substrate. But, with these new gardens some of us have contracted to have around our cottages, the clay substrate has been removed and replaced with nice loose sandy loam.

You may wonder why would a snapper travel so far overland to lay eggs. The easy answer is that "that is what they do," which doesn't really answer the question! The Snapping Turtle is a large predator with a disagreeable disposition and when it gets the size of this female there isn't any other animal that will actually threaten her. Actually, these turtles will travel far and wide to find new habitats to lay their 20-80 eggs. So, what is the driving force besides their DNA pushing them to find places to lay their eggs? Primarily, it is habitat destruction along with pollution and not enough food. Too much competition in a small space creates the need for Snappers to move and find other territories to occupy.

When eggs are laid the success rate for hatchlings is dependent on soil temperature. For eggs to hatch it takes between 9 to 18 weeks with an average of about 12-13 weeks. Since females will lay their eggs from the end of May to the end of June in our area, (later in the south), 9 - 18 weeks brings us anywhere from

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August to October and even November. It has been known that nestlings will winter over in the egg nest. However, if the eggs were laid June 14 to June 30 the eggs would be expected to hatch around the second week in September or October. That puts finding a baby snapper on October 10 certainly within reason.

Not to worry, I released the baby snapper on the shore of Deer Meadow Retention Pond and he/she shortly after release moved quickly, for a turtle, into the water. After getting acclimated to the water the baby turtle made itself at home looking for something to eat.

The Snapping Turtle is cold-tolerant, and studies have shown that some turtles do not hibernate. Since they are omniverous, eating both plant and animal matter and when big they become major predators. The newness of our retention pond suggests it won't take long before we will see young snapping turtles.

Yes, baby turtles are very vulnerable especially as they move from nest to water. On their travels over land from nest to water, many will not survive. Their instinct to find water is what drives them, completely oblivious of what may be ready to snatch them up. Once in the water they instinctively stay hidden, but herons, bitterns, gulls, mink, otters, even coyoties, find baby turtles to their liking. So, will this fellow survive and are there more than this fellow in the pond? I don't know; we will have to patiently wait and check this coming summer, 2016, to see if any are spotted.



Just hatched Snapping Turtle, *Chelydra serpentina*
Photo © Hilton Pond Center

SOFT RUSH

Remember the rhyme I talked about in the first two weeks of April, Sedges have edges, **RUSHES ARE ROUND**, Grasses have Joints, the world around? The Soft Rush, *Juncus effusus*, is a perfect example of a rush that is visibly round and very easy to identify.

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Soft Rush, *Juncus effusus* growing in Dragon's Pool
Photo © Dick Harlow

Soft or Common Rush is a wetland indicator plant, i.e. it grows in wet places. If *J. effusus* is present then you know you are walking in a wet area. If you see a medium to tall rounded dark green stem with its flowers protruding out of the stem, you are probably looking at Soft Rush. Because the stem is hollow you can squeeze it, which is probably why the stem is called soft.

Soft Rush is found wherever there is open wet ground, ditches, pond and lake edges, wet areas along woodland edges or in meadows and fields that have moist or wet soil.



Soft Rush, *Juncus effusus* close-up of the flower
growing out of the stem. Photo © Dick Harlow

Soft Rush is found throughout the world and is considered native in nearly all continents except Australia where it has become naturalized. This rush is even sold by some nurseries as a perennial and advertised as a good addition for your garden.

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BIRD FEEDING

One rule of thumb – Birds are opportunistic, curious, and are copycats. If they see birds feeding, (different species don't matter) they will be "Johnny on the spot" to investigate that food source.

Fall, Winter and Spring bird feeding primarily caters to those birds that eat seeds or will eat seeds in a pinch. It also includes birds that will eat fat or suet as a substitute for insects. Insects diminish in the Fall, are basically gone in the Winter and take some time to resurge in the Spring.

There are a variety of different seeds you can use, all dependent on what type of birds you want to attract to your feeder. Ground seed, such as cracked corn, and millet mixed with a great deal of filler seed will have a varying benefit to birds. Primarily, because they either won't eat the filler seed or they will touch very little of it. Pigeons and sparrows are attracted to ground seed.

If you want to attract finches, e.g. American Goldfinch, Pine Siskin, Common Redpoll and House Finch, thistle seed is by far the best attractant.

On the other hand, if you are hoping to attract Evening Grosbeaks, Cardinals or Purple Finches, a diet of Sunflower seed, either hulled or in the shell would be your best bet. As can be seen in the picture, goldfinches will also eat hulled sunflower seed.



American Goldfinch, *Spinus tristis* on a feeder with hulled sunflower Photo © Dick Harlow

Obviously, marketers know this, and will try and sell you seed that has all or a combination of these seeds, exclaiming that birds will eat their seed and try to convince you either by price or by advertisements that they are the experts. They will also fill their seed bags with the cheapest filler seed they can find and in some cases charge outlandish prices.

The one thing that marketers fail to acknowledge is that birds are fussy eaters. There are foods they will eat and there are foods they will not!

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I have been feeding birds for over 50 years and get fooled every now and again when I'm not careful and buy a package of cheap seed made up of mostly filler seed. Also, beware of old seed; check the "Best By" date on the package.

My recommendations are:

Hanging Feeders

Sunflower seed (hulled) for Finches, Grosbeaks, Cardinals, Bluejays, Chickadees, Titmice, Nuthatches, etc.

The interesting thing about shelled or black oil sunflower seed, is that they both come from the sunflower plant, *Helianthus annuus*, therefore it doesn't matter which plant the seed comes from, striped or black oil, it is all the same when it is hulled. Various names are given the hulled seed, cracked sunflower, or sunflower hearts. If you are concerned for the health of the birds you are feeding, cracked or hearts are considered an excellent source of protein, fiber and fat. If you don't want a mess of shells under your feeder that no animal will eat, that I know of, I suggest paying a little extra for the hulled seed.

If you are concerned that the hulled seed is too large for smaller birds, then buy the smaller pieces bagged as broken seed or sunflower chips.

There are definite benefits to buying hulled seed rather than sunflower in the shell. Especially for those birds that expend a great deal of their energy trying to find and open food. The hulled seed awards those birds, e.g. chickadees and titmice, a chance on using an energy efficient food along with less time wasted on procuring their food. The disadvantage is that hulled seed costs more. Someone has to hull the seed and that cost money.

Thistle (Niger, Nyjer) Seed for Finches, Siskins and Redpolls

Niger, or thistle seed, as it is called in America, is an oily, high-energy seed from Africa. Specifically, the seed is from the African yellow daisy, *Guizotia abyssinica*, which is not a thistle nor does it have any relationship to a thistle, even though Americans call this type of seed, thistle seed. The Wild Bird Feeding Industry trademarked this seed as Nyjer in 1998.

Finches love it. But, if it dries out, birds won't touch it and if allowed to get moldy, it will be harmful. So, this is a down side, you must keep your feeders clean, get rid of old and moldy seed and make sure you buy fresh seed from a reputable dealer.

Note that sparrows, e.g. Song, Savannah, White-crowned or White-throated, and House Sparrows as well, may take a stab at Nyjer, they will not hog the feeder for it. House Sparrows will take a stab at sunflower, but neither of these foods, Nyjer and hulled Sunflower, is their "cup of tea"! So they will be looking for that person(s) who puts out ground seed e.g. cracked corn and millet. Once that area is found they will be there on the ground feeding most of the time.

Now certainly individual pigeons (Rock Pigeon), will try anything and will, if they can get away with it, try to perch on your feeders. In so doing they will rock your feeders so that a great deal of the seed will fall to the ground where they and their compatriots will be happy to gobble it up. But, if you are careful with the bird feeders you buy, most large birds will get tired of trying to stay on small perches to get seed. It really depends on how cold a winter it is and how little food they have been able to find, that determines how persistent they will be with attacking your feeder.

However, pigeons will do you a service by cleaning up dropped de-hulled sunflower seed, but **not** shelled sunflower under your feeder. They will not take care of the shells if you feed shelled sunflower seed.

Suet (lining of the kidney, the fat that surrounds beef kidneys.)

The primary birds that feed on suet are Woodpeckers - Downy, Hairy and Pileated. However, mix with peanut butter and seed, the suet becomes a mix that titmice

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and nuthatches as well as Chickadees will go for. However, the one negative is that European Starlings LOVE suet. If there is a suet feeder that they feel safe around, they will devour the suet at the expense of other birds trying to have a go at the feeder.

Like the marketing of seed, there is also marketing done on suet. All kinds of fancy suet packs with seed and fat mixed together are available. You can make yourself by melting the suet and mixing seed into the suet, then putting the mixture into tins and refrigerate. Once the refrigerated suet is cut into packs that will fit a square or rectangular suet feeder you have put a lot of effort into a low cost bird food. If you buy commercial suet packets you can end up with a hefty cost paying for both seed and commercial suet packets during the winter. I prefer straight fresh suet from Hannaford's, Shaw's or a local market. I will use frozen in a pinch or if frozen is the only thing that is being sold at the time that I need it. However, I prefer fresh unfrozen suet.

Suet is fat! Birds need fat for the energy it supplies during cold winter days and nights keeping them warm and functioning. This is a necessary nutrient we provide our resident birds. They don't need seed or suet packs with additives and cheap filler ingredients.43

DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?

WHAT IS MY NAME?



Photo © Dick Harlow

The answer will be in the October 15-31 Notes.

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October: First Two-Week Sightings:

Butterfly List

- Monarch
- Viceroy
- Clouded Sulphur
- Cabbage White

Dragonfly List

- Canada Darner
- Ruby Meadowhawk

Damselflies

No Damselflies observed

Amphibian/Reptiles

- Green Frog
- Common Toad
- Snapping Turtle

Mammal List

- Eastern Cottontail
- Eastern Coyote (h)

Weather Tidbits

OCTOBER 1-14 Totals

All Measurements taken at solar noon (1230 EDT).

PRECIPITATION

OCTOBER 1-14, 2015 Total Precipitation: 37.4 mm or 1.5 inches

Overcast Days: 5

WIND

Highest wind OCTOBER 1: 28 MPH, Direction: North

Average Wind speed for OCTOBER 1-14: 2.6 mph

Dominate Wind Direction: North

Days w/wind gusts 20-30 MPH: 6

Days w/wind gusts 30 MPH: 0

TEMPERATURE

Mean Temp: 13.0 C⁰ 55.4 °F

High Temp: 27.6 C⁰ 81.7 °F

Low Temp: 4.0 C⁰ 39.2 °F