

## CONSERVE WILDLIFE FOUNDATION

### THE LUCKY 8: TINY TERRAPIN HATCHLINGS RESCUED!

*Article and photo by Ben Wurst, Habitat Program Manager, October 5, 2017*



While removing our seasonal (better late than never!) terrapin X-ING signs on Great Bay Blvd. in Little Egg Harbor yesterday, we stumbled upon some tiny northern diamondback terrapin hatchlings. These little guys were hiding or trapped under a very large (and heavy) X-ING sign made from old pallets that someone

knocked over (*I say guys because they hatched later in the season and it was a very cool August, but some could be girls*). At first I didn't see anything, but upon closer inspection I saw several hatchlings in the vegetation. One, two, three, four, five, six. Then I dug a little with my hand and found two more. The sign had been atop a nest.

Maybe it was meant to be that we found them when we did. If the sign was not covering their nest, then they could have been predated by a fox or raccoon, though it didn't look like it had been down for too long, maybe a month at most. If they could have gotten out on their own, then they would be a tasty treat for a gull... Either way, it was perfect timing to find them since days are getting longer and cooler, and their **chance of surviving to reach adulthood is only 1-3%**. In addition, I also knew that I could give them an even better chance of surviving to adulthood. One of my mentors Dr. John Wnek, creator of Project Terrapin and Supervisor of MATES, collects terrapin hatchlings from late season nests at Sedge Island that are "head started" by children in classrooms throughout the Barnegat Bay watershed. Last year my kids, who go to Bass River Elementary, got to help raise hatchlings in their classrooms. I'm so glad that my kids get this special opportunity to give back while learning about the life history of this underserved species!

This year Bass River students will get to **raise these special eight hatchlings**. They will be released in the spring after growing all winter to give them their best chance of surviving to adulthood by growing very quickly in their first year of life. As a parent and environmentalist, I'm really excited for this opportunity to work with teachers at Bass River to help shape our future environmental stewards to care for all wild critters on Earth. I hope to share updates on the progress of these little guys. Stay tuned!

***Note: Please remember that is it illegal to keep terrapins as pets!***