Nesting Turtles

June is prime time for Michigan turtles to find a suitable location for their nests. Turtles are reptiles and lay their eggs on land in either moist sand or soft soil. In order to find the best location for their nest some turtles travel long distances and sometimes cross roads toward their destination. These turtles are not lost and have good intuition as to where they are going; if you encounter a turtle crossing the road, and it is safe to help it across, you can either walk behind it until it reaches the side of the road it was facing, or you can carefully pick it up by its sides reaching your fingers under the bottom shell and carry it in the direction it was facing. Snapping turtles can cause injuries to people if picked up improperly; consider watching this species from afar for your safety.

Once they have found an appropriate location for their eggs, female turtles will use their hind feet to dig a hole and deposit the eggs into the earth. The eggs will remain in the ground until they hatch and the young turtles will make their way up out of the soil. Turtles are unique in the fact that the gender of the young turtles can be determined by the temperature at which the eggs were incubated; in many Michigan species if the eggs are kept in the warmer range they tend to be females and if kept in the cooler range they tend to be males.

Protecting Turtles

Although turtle populations have been declining each year, there are ways that people can help slow the rate of decline. Leaving turtles in the wild at all stages of their lives can help the local populations. Most wild female turtles in Michigan take more than a decade to sexually mature and should be left where they are found to encourage their growth. As you walk along the trails at CNC, please give space to the cages you may see this month; these cages were put out by staff to keep predators away from turtle nests. Contact a naturalist to find out how to protect a known nest on your property.