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The Turtle Trapper

By
C. E. Sprague

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Introduction

This book is written by a Turtle Trapper of fifteen years experience, in answer to many inquiries regarding this outdoor vocation.

It is a direct communication between the Trapper to the novice.

No attempt has been made at literary achievement.

The directions given herein are the outcome of practical experience.

Success on the part of the novice, however, will depend, to a great extent upon his own Integrity.

Follow the directions carefully, work diligently and success is bound to follow.

While this is good paying work, better perhaps than any other summer vocation, compared with the amount of money invested, the reward must not be measured in dollars and cents alone.

Every day spent in the great out of doors at this work means independence, happiness and good health.

The Turtle Trapper

By C. E. Sprague

The Snapping Turtle

There are some forty different specie of Turtle inhabiting the waters of North America. Among the most common is the—*Chelydra Serpentina*—or Snapping Turtle. And inasmuch as this specie is the most valuable of our aquatic reptiles as a food product, from a commercial standpoint, this specie will be discussed throughout this book exclusively.

The “Snapper” inhabits the greater part of our Eastern Hemisphere within the temperate zones. Up until recent years there has been little demand for their flesh as a food product. Recently, however, owing to the marked scarcity of the Diamond-back salt water terrapin, which by the way, is very closely related to the fresh water snapping turtle, there is an increasing

demand for their flesh as a food commodity.

The Diamond-back Terrapin has become so scarce of late years through persistent over fishing, that the Government has, through the Bureau of Fisheries, established experimental stations in hopes of reviving this fast diminishing specie.

These experiments have been quite successful, but it isn't likely that the propagation of this reptile in captivity will effect the ever increasing demand for the Snapping Turtle in the market.

The Snapping Turtle is found in most all rivers, lakes, and even in small ditches, preferring the slow-running, weed-grown streams and lakes with muddy bottoms.

Being exceedingly wary, they are, comparatively speaking, very seldom seen.

Their food consists mostly of fish, frogs, young waterfowl and no doubt many full-grown waterfowl falls prey to this vicious reptile.

The snapper is looked upon as a natural scavenger. This may apply to

some of the other species of turtle but not the snapper, views to the contrary notwithstanding. The snapper kills most of his food and experiments show that he has preference to fresh bloody meat, rather than putrid flesh.

In stalking their prey they bury themselves in the mud on river or lake bottom in fish runways among the weeds or lie under or close beside a sunken log, where they wait patiently, head drawn in, little beady eyes just clear of the mud, ever watching for fish to swim over or close to them. It is a luckless fish indeed that comes within a foot of his head, a quick dart, a snap of those powerful jaws, and the fish is a helpless captive, to be quickly torn to pieces and eaten.

The snapper has no teeth, but his jaws terminate in hooks, the upper hook extends over the lower one and when closed gnash by each other slightly enabling them to catch and hold even the smallest particle of food.

If fishing proves dull he moves about looking for other prey, perhaps it

might be a frog swimming leisurely out to his favorite lily pad, or a flock of waterfowl feeding way back in the shallows he swims cautiously and deliberately under his victim not breaking the surface of the water until near enough to make the strike, then a quick dart, and another morsel is added to his fare. He grasps waterfowl by the leg pulls them under water to drown.

The turtle locates his prey through scent. The scent is carried to him by the current of water, just as the scent of game is carried to the hunting dog through the current of air, and as the dog always scents his game from up-wind, just so does the turtle scent his prey from up stream.

They very seldom if ever seek their food out of water. In fact if they did so it would be necessary for them to drag it into the water to eat, as it is impossible for the snapper to swallow their food, unless under water.

The turtle is, of course, a hibernating reptile, burying himself in mud, late in the fall, remaining in a dormant state until the warm days of spring,

when he emerges from his winter sleep becoming more active as the weather becomes warmer.

Therefore the trapper's harvest begins about the time that real summer weather prevails, continuing until late summer. As the season advances toward the later part of summer the turtle becomes more and more inactive due to the fact that he is acquiring more fat each day. In fact in the warmer climates where the season is longer, and perhaps food is more plentiful, he becomes so fat and awkward, near the end of the season, that when out of water he is almost helpless, the flesh protruding beyond his shell causing difficulty in the movement of his limbs.

He cannot draw his head entirely within his shell as does the Box Turtle nor his tail, but when on the defensive folds his tail around the underedge of upper shell. The upper shell has a rough, ridged appearance with check-

ered or diamond shaped markings, very rough and notchy around rear edge. As the turtle grows older and larger the upper shell takes on a smoother appearance, dark olive in color and usually has a growth of moss on the back, a very effective camouflage furnished by nature, for indeed they look very much like round, moss-grown stones lying on the river bottom.

The lower shell or plastron does not extend as far over the body as the upper shell and has a dull yellow color. The skin covering that part of body and head not covered by the shell has a rough, warty appearance, dark olive on the upper and dull yellow on the lower sides.

The feet are broad and webbed, equipped with five claws. The front feet are used in holding and helping to tear to pieces the prey.

In swimming the head and neck is extended and is used in conjunction with the tail in guiding themselves through the water. The tail is nearly as long as the body, very thick at base,

tapering to a slender point, with a row of spines along center of top.

The male turtle may be determined by his short, chunky appearance, while the female more trim, longer, and consequently more supple in action.

In the early summer the female leaves the water in search of a suitable place to deposit her eggs. She usually selects a sandy southern slope where the soil contains a certain degree of moisture. Instinct seems to help the mother turtle in selecting her nest well away from danger of freshet or overflowing of the river and yet the soil must not become too dry. She digs a hole six or eight inches deep, backs in, and deposits the eggs, sixteen to twenty-four in number. I have been told that greater numbers have been found in a single nest, but I think in those cases more than one female used the same nest, the second one digging open the nest after the first one had left. After she has deposited her eggs she carefully covers the nest, dragging her body over the loose dirt to hide any

appearance of digging, then leaves, never to return to look after her offspring. Her responsibility has ended. The eggs are white, perfectly round, with a hard shell, and they are considered edible by many people. The eggs left under these conditions, fall easy prey to many egg-eating birds and animals such as crows, owls, skunks, rats, etc. The time required to hatch the eggs is eight or nine weeks, according to weather conditions.

When the young turtle emerges from the shell and digs his way out of the sand, he is again subject to annihilation from those same enemies before mentioned.

There are many interesting stories told about the young turtle. It has been said that when leaving the nest, they instinctively start straight toward the water, but if a log or any obstruction is encountered that stops his progress, he returns to the nest and makes another start, setting a course at a slightly different angle, repeating this until the water is reached, but never trying to find the way around the obstruction without first returning to the nest. I

cannot vouch for this story, however, although I have often watched the young turtles leaving the nest, but always under more favorable conditions for them to reach water.

The young turtle does not show much activity during the remainder of the first season but buries itself in the moss or weeds in the water. Scientists tell us that they take no nourishment whatever during the first season of their lives, but subsist on a deposit left in their stomachs, composed of the yolk of the egg from which they are hatched. During the second season, those that have withstood the ravages of winter, feed on water insects, young snails, a certain amount of vegetable matter, etc. There is no doubt that a very large per cent of them die during the first winter, especially in the northern climates. After they become two years old they have no natural enemies except man. Naturally the turtle lives to be very old and the older they are the more vicious and wary they become.

Snapping turtles can live under water without air ten to twelve hours, but no longer.

The Trap

There are several different types of turtle traps in use, yet the fundamental principles are the same in all of them. I have used most of them and after fifteen years experience have concluded that the one herein described is the strongest, lightest and most practical trap one could use and very easy to build.

I knit my own traps as do many other trappers, but realizing that this would appear to most prospective trappers a tedious, tiresome undertaking, will not attempt to describe the method of knitting traps. There are several different advertisements appearing in different outdoor magazines where one can obtain instructions in tying nets. This, as I said before, might seem a difficult undertaking yet it is simple enough after getting started.

For the benefit of the prospective trapper who would not care to knit his

own traps, I have written to several mail order houses, and I find that nets may be ordered in any desired length and width in different sized mesh.

These nets are listed in their catalogues as drag seins, but are equipped with floats and leads which would be superfluous in the manufacture of the turtle trap. Order from your nearest mail order house drag sein, seventy-five running feet by five foot width, one inch mesh, No. 16 soft twine. This amount will cost somewhere around ten dollars according to the market. It would be advisable to send ten dollars with order. If fluctuations of market have raised charges will accompany the goods on delivery for the deficiency, and if lowered the difference will be refunded. Be sure and mention in order that the net is wanted **without** floats or leads. A delay of about ten days must be expected on this order as it is special, for only complete nets are carried in stock.

This amount of netting will make up fifteen traps which is about the right number for one man to look after. Possibly one could tend a few more at

times but as a rule this number is all that one man can look after properly. Turtle traps could be made with mesh as large as three inches and still hold any turtle of marketable size, but in using the smaller mesh many small mud turtles and soft shells, and often fish of the dead-bait-eating variety such as mud cats and dogfish are caught and can be used for bait, where if caught in a larger mesh trap these would escape.

The laws of some states prohibit the use of any device for taking turtles that will take fish.

It is advisable to post yourself on the fish and game laws governing your state and if such a law prevails, order at least a four-inch mesh instead of the one-inch. A mesh of this size will not hold any ordinary fish that one would find in turtle waters.

Also order two bunches of No. 11 trot or set line cotton containing about three hundred feet in each bunch. This will cost somewhere around \$3.75 to \$4.00. This twine is about the size of the ordinary chalk line and usually

(Illustration No. 1)

may be obtained in any locality. This will be used for draw strings and for half-hitching the net on the hoops. Upon receiving net, measure off in five foot lengths and cut squarely across in center of mesh, take pains in retying all knots where cut is made as knots are liable to slip. These tied ends are to form the ends of the trap.

In order to properly build these traps a form must be built first. This form can be used for building any number of traps and may be built of any scrap lumber. Illustration No. 1 shows form ready to set up.

The form consists of two circular shapes or moulds approximately $18\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. Take pieces of lumber about twenty inches long and a sufficient number of pieces laid side to side to make it about twenty inches wide, nail two strips across about one-third of way from each end, the illustration No. 1 will give you the idea, then take a carpenter's compass dividers and strike a circle of the above mentioned diameter. If you haven't

(Illustration No. 2)

the dividers take a lath, cut a notch in one end, measure off nine and one-fourth inches from apex of notch, drive a small nail through lath and start it into about center of where circle is to be cut, hold pencil in notch and draw circle, this will answer as well as carpenter's dividers.

Cut out form with compass saw and repeat operations for the other form. Now take eight pieces of $\frac{7}{8}$ inch strips, two inches wide and three feet long, and nail to edges of circular form, bringing the ends of strips just even with outside surface of end forms. Illustration No. 2 will give the idea how strips should be spaced.

Now the form is ready for the hoops. There are four hoops used in each trap. These should be made of galvanized bail wire. This wire is such that is used for bails on metal pails. But if this wire cannot be secured, common No. 9 galvanized fence wire may be used by twisting two strands together. Wooden hoops are often used and if good straight grained tough wood such as

(Illustration No. 3)

elm, ash, or hickory they will do very well but of course are bulkier than the wire. Use wire hoops if possible as they are lighter and take up less space when outfit is packed which is quite important as all campers and trappers know. If wire hoops are used, bend wire around form, lap the ends about three inches, holding with clamp and solder. Illustration No. 2 shows wire hoops in place and method of soldering (Illustration No. 2). If wooden hoops are used they may be fastened with small nails or wrapped with string notching the wood where it laps over to prevent slipping. Do not make hoops too tight on form, but leave them loose enough to be slipped over form easily. If wooden hoops are used shave them out about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick and $\frac{7}{8}$ to one inch wide.

After hoops are made, place one at each end of form and the other two a foot from each end. Now take a five-foot piece of the net and lay over the form and hoops, with knotted ends over the ends of form, tying the ends of net together lengthwise of form, mesh to mesh until entire length is tied.

(Illustration No. 4)

(Illustration No. 5)

(Illustration No. 6)

Illustration No. 3 shows about the desired proportions to project over the ends of form.

After net is tied together lengthwise, run a draw string through the end appearing at left of illustration No. 3, put string in one mesh and out the next, continuing clear around the entire end, leave string long enough that net may be opened the full size of form and tie ends of draw string together. This is the rear end of trap giving access to bait hook, and for removing the catch.

Now draw net straight on form toward the opposite or forward end until it hangs even all around and half-hitch net on the hoops as shown in illustration No. 5.

Pass twine through net, where it crosses hoop, under hoop, back through net and run twine through loop thus formed making a half-hitch. Make a half-hitch every inch or so all around each hoop. This will hold hoops in place.

Now we come to the mouth, or business end of trap. Run a draw-string through the mouth end of net the same

(Illustration No. 7)

(Illustration No. 8)

(Illustration No. 9)

as you did the rear end, draw this up until there is an opening about fourteen inches across when the edges are together, leave this string a little longer for adjustment if found necessary. Illustration No. 6 will give the idea.

Now take two pieces of twine each about five feet long and double each piece, slip loop at opposite points through net and draw string. Illustration No. 6 also shows how these should be placed. These are stay strings to hold the mouth of trap in place. Trap may now be removed from form.

The next step will be to place the side sticks on outside of trap. Take two pieces of lath or any small sticks, I use green saplings as they are tougher and heavier, these should be slightly longer than the trap between the end hoops, cut notches near ends as shown in illustration No. 8 and tie to end hoops at points even with stay strings.

The trap must be drawn taut on these side sticks otherwise it will lop this way and that, but if drawn taut will be rigid and firm.

The mouth end may now be turned inside of trap, passing the ends of stay

(Illustration No. 10)

strings out through the opposite sides of trap just ahead of third hoop from mouth end and tie to the rear hoop of trap, drawing taut. Illustration No. 9 shows the size the opening should be at mouth of trap; this may be arranged by adjusting draw string. Now take a piece of twine and tie to top of third hoop from mouth end and let hang down and tie to bottom of same hoop, fastening a wire hook on this string directly in line with mouth of trap for bait hook. Some trappers use a tin can with half inch holes punched here and there to put their bait in, instead of a hook. This is a very good idea as the first turtle entering the trap cannot tear bait loose causing it to fall to bottom of trap thereby ending the catch until fresh bait is again placed on the hook. Now the trap is complete and ready to use as shown in illustration No. 10.

Illustration No. 11 shows trap in knockdown, note the small amount of space taken up where wire hoops are used. A set of fifteen of these traps takes up very little room and may be packed in an ordinary sack.

(Illustration No. 11)

Outfitting

The outfit used by the turtle trapper may be as elaborate or as simple as will suit the personal desires. Outside of the traps the most essential thing will be a good boat. A light, flat bottom, double end skiff such as fur trappers use would be a good selection. A boat that is steady, as often it is necessary to haul a catch of one hundred pounds or more over side and yet one should paddled or poled through weeds, drawn have a boat that is light enough to be over logs, or even make short portages with, as often small ponds adjacent to river or lake will be found good trapping and some means must be had in reaching them. As traps are some times set in four to six feet of water a hook is handy to raise and lower traps. This hook is similar to a gaff hook only the iron is heavier and opening should be about two inches across between point of hook and shank, and set in a handle

like a broomstick or a little larger. This hook will be handy to use as a boat hook and handling turtles, as well as handling traps. Also include in outfit a goodly assortment of nails, hammer, and saw for nailing together a box in which to keep the turtles until a shipment is made. This box can be made of drift boards, poles or any material that may be picked up along the river. This box should be partly submerged in the water as turtles will not do very well when penned up on dry land. A box, say ten feet long, four feet wide and a foot deep is large enough to store a half a ton of turtles and they will keep very nicely for a week or ten days. Turtles should be fed each day when waiting shipment.

Among other things quite important in making up the outfit will be a small caliber rifle or a shot gun for securing bait which will be mentioned in a later chapter, also camp axe for cutting

fire wood, side stays, trap stakes, bait, and other uses too numerous to mention.

As traps must be lifted every twelve hours, the trapper must provide some means of staying in close touch with his trap line. An ordinary camping outfit will solve this problem, and while unnecessary things should be dispensed with one should take along enough to insure himself at least personal comfort.

Most farmers and property owners will welcome the turtle trapper, but it is best to always look up the owner of property on which camp is to be made and get his permission before trespassing.

On large streams, with tributaries that would insure several seasons trapping, I would not hesitate in recommending a small houseboat. The difference in the cost of tent and a small houseboat would soon be made up in

The House Boat is an Ideal Trapper's Home

comfort. A houseboat may be easily towed from place to place, and when a suitable place is selected for a stay, drop the anchor or tie up to bank and camp is all built, just as much so as though you had been there a week. Screens may be fitted to doors and windows, an awning swung over the deck end, bunks built inside, in fact fitted up just to suit personal taste. A person who has never spent a summer on a houseboat has certainly missed something. There is no better mode of camping. Often a houseboat already built may be purchased very reasonable, or perhaps a scow may be bought very cheap and a cabin built on the deck to suit one's own taste. It is not only a matter of comfort that the houseboat is the most desirable but often there are miles and miles of swamp and marsh where it would be impossible to pitch a tent and yet would be the finest kind of turtle grounds. I cannot say too much in favor of the houseboat. For those who intend to

trap small streams, lakes and mill ponds a light wagon with cabin built on would make a good outfit. A light steel boat or one of the folding variety could be lashed along side of the cabin in moving from place to place. This would not necessarily mean that the trapper would have to own a horse, as some obliging farmer could be hired to move outfit to the next camping spot. These moves could be arranged for some evening or odd time that would not take a man from his regular work. Or perhaps the prospective trapper owns an auto of some kind. He could very easily rig up a camp-trailer similar to the ones that are advertised in all outdoor magazines. Bedding, stove, dishes, etc., are all folded in the trailer in a very compact manner and when set up for use the bottom of trailer box forms the tent floor, keeping the occupants up off the ground high and dry. While the auto could be used to a good advantage in hauling the catch to market, bringing in supplies, prospecting

for new grounds, etc., and in moving the boat could be lashed on top of trailer. This would make a splendid outfit for spot trapping.

Of course the auto outfit, and the houseboat involve a considerable outlay of money, but I mention these as a suggestion to the prospective trapper because both are practical outfits insuring independence to the trapper. I have spent several seasons trapping with just an ordinary camping outfit consisting of a small sleeping tent, sheet iron stove, folding cot, etc., and a small skiff, in fact so small that when my outfit was packed aboard there was just room for me to stand in stern of boat to pole to the next camping spot. And while these were prosperous seasons I have learned since that considerable time is lost, that would be saved with either of the above named outfits. The last few seasons I have been using a small gasoline cabin boat, which is very practical.

An Ideal Craft for the Turtle Trapper

Baits

As I stated in the first chapter of this book that the turtle's food comprises mostly of fish, it is natural that fish would make good bait, but such bait is often hard to procure. The small mesh traps will catch more or less of the dead-bait-eating fish such as dogfish, catfish and mud-cats. A good sized dogfish, say one that would weigh four to six pounds would make enough bait for three or four traps. Simply cut them crosswise in three or four pieces according to size and place in bait can. If such fish are not caught the trapper must get busy with his bait-gun. There are usually plenty of blackbirds, crows, hawks, owls, or perhaps woodchucks in most localities and any of these will make excellent bait. I sometimes think that the above mentioned birds and animals make better bait than the fish as I think the scent carries further than the fish owing to the greater amount of blood. A nice fat woodchuck would make eight or ten baits if cut up in that many pieces, using entrails as well as

Setting Up Traps in Camp

the flesh. If the trapper is located near a slaughter house, plenty of fresh bloody meat can be secured. Always use fresh bait. Bait the traps night and morning. It is advocated by some that turtles do not feed during the daytime, but if fresh bait is used it will be found that the day catch will nearly equal the night catch.

Small land turtles and leather backs make fairly good bait; cut off the head with camp axe or hatchet and quarter. This bait is always at hand as they are attracted to the traps as well as the snapping turtle. Always keep a supply of these on hand, alive, to be used when other bait cannot be had.

Looking for Sets

How and Where to Set Traps

For convenience sake traps are usually carried in the knockdown, that is the side sticks are removed. On reaching the desired trapping ground the trapper proceeds to set up his traps. I always set up my traps before starting out to place them, although they may be set up on the line as required. Load as many traps in boat as is convenient and start along close to shore. Keep sharp lookout for channels in weeds or lily pads or any place that looks like possible fish runways. These are the hangouts of the turtle. Bait trap, and lower to bottom of river or lake as the case may be; if in river always face the mouth of trap down stream. This is very important, a trap placed in any other position is just a waste of time. The turtle will come to trap from the down stream direction, the scent of the bait being carried to him by the current and he follows the scent through the water to the trap. The result of a trap being placed in any other position is obvious. The turtle would find a wall

Jam Piles are Turtles' Natural Haunt

of net between him and the bait and they positively will not enter trap on the up-stream side of bait, as when they get on the upstream side there is no scent to attract them in.

Turtles are not hard to catch, on the contrary they are very easy, it is just a matter of judgment in placing the traps. In trapping a lake use your own judgment in placing traps. For instance, trap should be placed in weeds facing open water or if near inlet or outlet of lake, there will be a current, however slight, it is a current just the same and traps must be placed accordingly. After trap is placed on bottom, take a pole of sufficient length to reach bottom with three or four feet to spare and shove between side stick and trap into the mud bottom firmly. This answers a double purpose, viz: marking location of trap and also to keep trap from rolling. A turtle when caught will, sooner or later, want to come up for air and will naturally start climbing up side of trap. If pole is not used the trap of course will start rolling like a

"Making a Set"

squirrel's wheel, ending up no knowing where. Never pass up an old drift pile or log jam in river or a fallen tree. These are natural haunts for the turtle, and a trap properly placed above these places will insure a good catch.

Arrange to have camp as centrally located on the line as possible for convenience sake. Watch your traps closely, if a trap is not productive, take it up and move it to another location. A set should not be condemned, however, if a catch is not made the first day. Let trap stand twenty-four to thirty-six hours before passing judgment on the set.

The locality within reach of camp should pay commercially for a week or ten days. When the catch begins to drop off it is time to move. Do not spend time working a caught-out "spot." Make every day count, practice efficiency. It pays in every line of work. Turtle trapping is no exception. Mill ponds are usually very good trapping grounds. The rising and falling of the water does not necessarily

Good Turtle Waters

hamper the turtle trapper as it does the fur trapper, as traps set in four to six feet of water will stand a rise or fall of two feet without retarding the catch. Lakes large and small are more or less productive in all localities. Do not waste time trying out swift, clear streams with rocky and gravelly bottoms; always select warm, slow running streams, muddy bottom with plenty of aquatic vegetation.

Making a Set Beside the Half Sunken Log

The Markets

Eastern cities have always been active turtle markets with Philadelphia in the lead and New York a close second. Commission men are located at these points handling both sea turtles and snappers. Hundreds of tons of turtles are handled in these cities each year, involving greater business and capital than the average person could imagine.

Turtles shipped to a reliable commission man will be handled in a prompt business-like manner, and it is but a matter of days until a check will be received by the shipper, also an itemized account of weight, express charges, commission, dead turtles (if any) and balance due to shipper.

I will not hesitate in recommending as reliable commission men—M. J. Ryan, Front and Dock Sts., Philadelphia, Pa. His advertisement appears in the Hunter, Trader and Trapper as well as some other outdoor magazines.

Also Clark Stiles & Co., 14 Dock St. fish market, Philadelphia, Pa. I have shipped to these men more or less for years and I know they are reliable dealers.

It is not always advisable, however, to ship to commission men. Perhaps there is a better market closer by. In saying this I do not mean any more reliable, but perhaps a better price may be had for your turtles. For instance, if the trapper is located in or near a summer resort region he will experience no difficulty in disposing of his catches as fast as the traps are run. Arrange to see the stewards of the resort hotels, they will usually be glad to take more or less according to the number of guests he has to feed once or twice a week. Good customers will be found among the cottagers and campers as well; once let it become known that you are in the business, and you will be hailed from every quarter. First class hotels and restaurants are also good customers in the

larger cities. More or less may be sold right at camp to passing fishermen and trappers. Turtles sold in this way usually bring about twice as much as will be received from commission men.

The price of turtles on the eastern markets fluctuates from around six cents to twelve cents per pound, live weight. I have never sold for less than ten cents per pound, locally, and the last few years have received fifteen cents per pound for every pound caught, and the demand always exceeded the supply.

I have noticed, with more than passing interest that some trappers arrange to winter part of their summer's catch. I haven't the least doubt that this would pay, providing one had a suitable place for doing so, like an unused basement, an old cellar or in fact any place that would not freeze too hard. Turtles bring a fancy price in late winter and early spring, often as high as twenty-five or thirty cents per pound. I understand all that is necessary is to put them in damp loose earth, enough for them to bury themselves in. No feeding or attention is required.

How to Ship

If the trapper wishes to ship his catch to commission men, or any distance by rail, it is necessary to put them in boxes or barrels. I would recommend boxes rather than barrels, shallow boxes, say, about two or two and a half feet long, eighteen or twenty-four inches wide and six or eight inches deep. A discarded soap box or a shoe case will do very nicely. If there is any doubt as to whether it is strong enough to stand the strain, it would be well to strengthen it by putting a strap iron or a baling wire around each end of box, nailing or stapling it securely into the end boards of the box, this will double the strength of the box. The box should by all means have a number of holes cut or bored here and there for ventilation, but must be small enough to prevent the turtles from getting their heads through.

Turtles shipped in barrels do not stand the shipment as well as those shipped in boxes, as the bottom layers have too much weight bearing on them,

and with the jolt and jar of the express car the loss would run heavy on extra long distance.

I think it pays to put a light layer of water weeds well soaked, and give the boxes a good soaking with water just before shipping. True, it may add a few pounds to the express charges but the condition of the turtles on the arrival at destination will more than make that up.

A few years ago most of us trappers shipped our catch in heavy burlap sacks, tying a short stick in a heavy piece of twine at each end of sack for a handle. The losses ran heavy in this kind of shipping, due to rough handling, no doubt. Boxes and shipping cases tipping over on them, thrown to and from the car at transfer points like so many bags of castings. The express companies will not accept turtles in bags any more for some reason. Perhaps some employee was seriously bitten, or perhaps on account of numerous claims presented for loss of turtles. At any rate it is a good thing for the shipper that they cannot be shipped in bags. Turtles should remain

in the large storage box, where they will be more in their natural element until just before shipment is made. Don't pack them in small boxes and let them lay around a day or two before shipping. It is not necessary to pay express charges in advance. Simply tag the boxes and turn them over to the local express office. The commission man will pay express charges and deduct the amount from the remittance to you.

Never handle turtles roughly, even though they are protected with a shell; always handle them carefully, they will reach their destination in a much better condition.

A Pair of Medium "Snappers"

How I Made \$25.00 Per Day For Twenty-Five Days in the Month of March

While this incident, which I am about to relate has no real bearing on turtle trapping, yet it proved to be the most prosperous haul I ever experienced in handling turtles. Similar circumstances might arise in any locality, during any winter or spring. At any rate I don't think it would be out of place to mention it here.

It was the break-up of the mildest winter in the history of the state. Commission men in eastern cities were busy mailing quotations on turtles at fancy prices to turtle trappers throughout the country. Turtle trappers throughout the country were kicking themselves for not having a shipment of wintered turtles on hand; for it was the first of March and chances for getting turtles at that time of year is mighty slim in Michigan.

I was trapping for muskrats at that time, along a small stream located in the central part of the state. Just a

lazy little stream it was, in fact so lazy that it didn't perform the functions that it was supposed to of properly draining the surrounding country. I had looked upon this stream for some time as being an ideal turtle ground, but during the summer months it was impossible to get near it on account of quick sand and mire. Neither was it possible to use a boat for miles and miles on account of brush, weeds and shallow water. Indeed, even in winter, one had to use the utmost care in walking along the banks, a mis-step or a slip, and no one knows how far one would sink into that oozy slime. So in summer the turtles, frogs, and water snakes had this little stream all to themselves. But the progressive farmers in this community saw the possibility of reclaiming a good many acres of valuable land if this stream was properly dredged.

The huge dredge had been unloaded from flat cars on the bank of this stream where the railroad crossed it and the men were setting it up as I returned from visiting my traps one day,

for the dredge had been shipped in the knock-down. It seemed like an enormous undertaking to me and I paused each day as I passed to watch the men put it together. At last the huge machine was ready and started widening and straightening the stream. The houseboat in which the dredge men ate and slept was towed along behind as well as a large scow which was used for towing coal to the dredge. They moved along at a remarkable pace, and every day I had to pull up traps that were in the path of the dredge. I think it was the fourth of March that I paused on my way home to watch the operations a few moments, when as the big dipper swung over the bank to dump its load of mud, I saw a large snapper roll down the bank. Now Mr. Snapper had gone to bed there the previous fall, fully expecting to sleep there until the warm days of April or May. He didn't figure that a great machine would come down and rout him out of his winter bed, or probably he would have chosen some other spot and if he had I would not have discovered my little gold mine. Well I picked up Mr. Turtle who

appeared to be dead but was only in a dormant state and waited to see if any more would roll down the bank. Sure enough another large one came over in the next dipperful of mud. Then the circular that I had received from the commission man loomed up in my mind with the fancy prices and I realized that it would not take many turtles to make a big day's pay.

I went over and asked the foreman of the outfit if he had any objections if I watched the dumps for turtles. He assured me that he had no objections whatever, only cautioned me not to get too close to the dipper as I might get buried in the mud. "It's all right son, but don't get under the dipper if she dumps a load on you 'twould take a half a day to dig you out."

That night I got the little boat out of the shed and put it on the boat cart for I could now use a boat in the channel that had been dredged and the next morning I was on the job bright and early. It was rather dull at times watching the dumps with no turtles

showing and then again business would brighten up and I would get several, sometimes two and three at a dump. Turtles usually go into their winter beds close together.

It was dirty work standing there in the oozy mud and a cold north wind coming down across the marsh but I realized that I was making good money and that encouraged me to stay on the job. When the dredge crew stopped for dinner I stopped too and had a lunch and when they started again I was on the job with them, pulling a big fellow out of the mud here and perhaps a smaller one there and putting them in burlap sacks to be gathered up later when it began to grow dark and the crew stopped work for the night.

When I gathered up my sacks imagine my surprise when I found I had four heavy sacks of turtles. I weighed them later and they weighed two hundred and twenty-three pounds, and when the express train left that village that night, Mr. Commission Man had \$56.15 worth of turtles coming his way. I felt so good over my find that I

wanted to tell about it, but I realized the results, so I didn't breathe it to a soul.

The next morning I was on the job again with a pair of good hip boots, an extra pair of woolen socks and plenty of warm clothes on, for it was tedious work standing there all day with very little exercise. I was very careful too, not to let any one see the amount of turtles I was getting but kept them gathered up and in the boat out of sight.

"How many are you getting today, son?" the foreman called to me that afternoon. "Oh, enough for a dinner, I guess," was my answer. "Well you've more nerve than I have to stand out there all day for a measly old turtle or two." It never occurred to him that I was shipping them, and making better wages than any man on the dredge. Each night at dusk I would take my cargo of turtles up the big ditch, wash them clean, sack them and take them home on the boat cart. It seemed strange to me to handle turtles in their dormant state, it was like handling dead turtles. When I arrived home

with them I would box them up in soap boxes or any box about that size and take them down to the express office to go out on the night express train. Then I would gather all the boxes I could obtain at the different stores for my next night's shipment. After a while the supply became exhausted and I had to make my own boxes. Some days my shipment would run as high as two hundred and fifty pounds and then again I would only have fifty or seventy-five pounds to ship, but I shipped my catch every night as I was afraid that the price would lower.

And so went the three weeks and four days that I spent following the dredge. I received twenty-five cents per pound for all that I found. The weather was now getting warmer and the turtles were showing some signs of life and probably in a few days if the warm weather continued they would begin to move around on their own accord. On the fourth day of the fourth week that I followed the dredge a large bevel gear broke and would cause several days delay to the work.

By the time a new one was cast and in

place the weather had become quite warm and I watched the dumps from my boat as the frost had entirely left the ground and it was impossible to get out on the bank, but not a turtle showed. They had come back from their winter's sleep and were slipping away from the big plunging dipper a little slow and logie yet, perhaps, but with all of their faculties that makes them so wary, I realized that my job was done. I had shipped nearly a ton and a half of turtles and after the express charges were paid I had a net profit of six hundred and twenty-five dollars for twenty-five days work.

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