



herp|crossing

helping reptiles and amphibians cross the road



Like virtually all of Pennsylvania's wildlife, reptiles and amphibians must cross the road at some point in their lives. Unfortunately, they fare much worse on the roads than most wildlife because they are slower and more difficult to see. For some species, road mortality can have drastic long term effects on entire populations. This is especially true for turtles, because turtles' reproductive strategy is based entirely on longevity. Many species of turtles don't start reproducing until they are at least 5-10 years old. They produce very low numbers of offspring each year and the eggs and hatchlings suffer heavily from predation. A turtle must live a long time in order for even one of its offspring to successfully make it to adulthood and replace it in the population. Unfortunately, the world is a far more dangerous place for turtles than it once was. Road mortality is one of the main reasons.



Amphibians also suffer heavily. On rainy nights in the Spring, millions of amphibians make their annual migrations to their breeding pools, often having to cross a road on their way. If it's a busy road, the mortality rate can be extremely high. Some roads in Pennsylvania actually have such a large number of amphibians crossing to make it to the breeding pools that they are closed at night during the spring migration season. Unfortunately, closing roads is seldom a feasible option.

Here are some tips to help you be a better steward and safely help the reptiles and amphibians you encounter on the roadways:



★ Safely stop your car and put on your flashers. Make sure it is safe for you to exit your car. Do not put yourself at risk.

★ Move the animal to the other side of the road in the direction it was traveling. This is important because most reptiles and amphibians have a good sense of direction and they are determined to get where they were going. If you put them on the side they came from, it is extremely likely that they will move back onto the roadway.

★ Snakes can usually be coaxed off the road without handling. If you are unsure of the snake species do not handle it. Coming to a stop and letting the animal cross on its own may also work with snakes.



★ Turtles, frogs, lizards and salamanders can be moved easily by hand. Large turtles may bite, but they can be handled by carefully grabbing them by the back of the shell. No turtle should ever be picked up by their tail.

Though it may be tempting to take the animal home with you, it is almost always best to leave the animal in nature. Many of Pennsylvania's reptiles and amphibians are protected and it is illegal to take them from the wild.