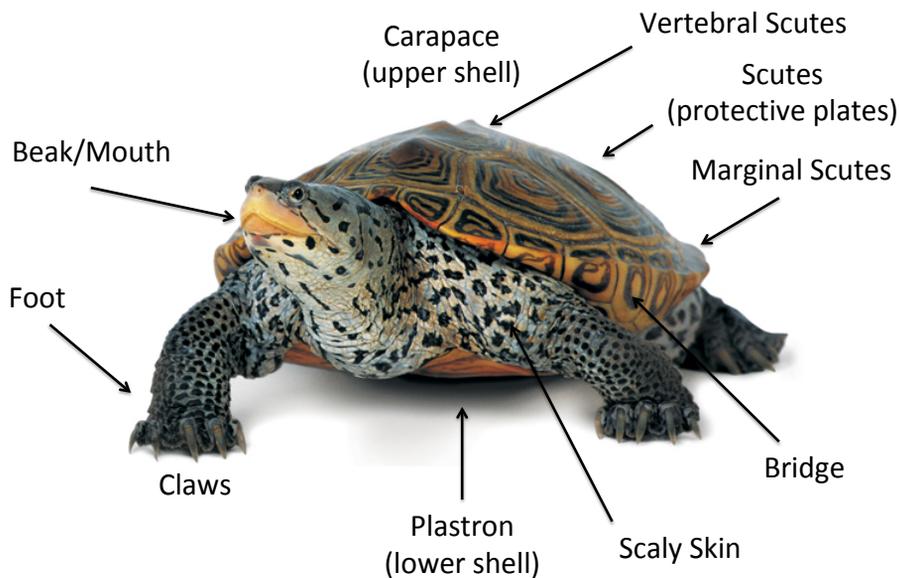




Diamondback Terrapin

The northern diamondback terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin*) is the state turtle of Maryland. Terrapins live in almost every tidal river in the Chesapeake Bay, and spend their entire lives in brackish water. They can be found in a wide range of salinity levels, from water that is nearly fresh in the upper Bay to full salt water near the Atlantic Ocean. The terrapin is a medium sized turtle whose shell can be up to nine inches long. The carapace, or upper shell, has scutes with growth rings that form a pattern that looks like a diamond. The head and the neck areas are grayish-blue with black speckles. The bottom shell, or plastron, can range in color from yellow to gray (*see image below*).



Diamondback terrapins search for food in marshes and coastal areas. They eat worms, clams, snails, crabs, and vegetation. In the spring, females lay ten to fifteen eggs in shallow nests on sandy beaches. The young terrapins hatch in about three months, and the lucky ones that avoid predators can live for up to forty years!

Diamondback terrapins have made a remarkable comeback in the Chesapeake Bay over the past twenty years. At one point in the early 1900s, terrapin soup was so popular in restaurants from Baltimore to New York City that the turtles were almost hunted to extinction. More recently, the population has grown back to a healthy level due to new laws, habitat restoration, and changes in peoples' tastes. Today it is common to see terrapins' heads poking out of the water when exploring the creeks and marshes of the Bay.



Diamondback Terrapin

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

DIRECTIONS: Read the text on the previous page, then answer the following questions in complete sentences. Write your answers on the lines provided.

1. Where can terrapins be found in the Chesapeake Bay?

2. How large can terrapins get?

3. What do terrapins eat?

4. How long can a terrapin live?

5. Why were terrapins nearly hunted to extinction? How have they been able to make a comeback in the Chesapeake Bay?
