

**Kathy Zagzebski**

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**From:** Kathy Zagzebski  
**Sent:** Friday, May 29, 2009 6:55 PM  
**To:** Kathy Zagzebski  
**Subject:** Public Invited to Rare Turtle Marking and Release May 29 and June 1

## **MASSWILDLIFE ADVISORY- 5/28/09**

**WHO: Dept. of Fish & Game, Division of Fisheries and Wildlife Staff and Turtle Partners**

**WHAT: Headstarted Endangered Turtle Release**

**WHEN: Friday, May 29—Turtles brought to MassWildlife Headquarters in Westboro for weighing and marking Monday, June 1—Turtle Release in Middleborough 10:30 AM.** Department of Fish and Game Commissioner Mary Griffin and MassWildlife staff will be present to answer questions. Public is invited to assist in releasing the turtles.

**BACKGROUND:** Hatchling Northern Red-bellied Cooters (turtles) were removed from the wild last fall and placed with partnering educational and scientific facilities from across the state to accelerate growth and reduce mortality during a turtle's first year of life. Raised in warm aquarium environments with unlimited food, these turtles grow quickly and are no longer as vulnerable to predation when released the following year. The process is called "Headstarting". Cooperating partners will be bringing headstarted turtles to MassWildlife's Field Headquarters in Westborough for final weighing, measuring and shell marking. Release will take place at Great Quittacas and Pocksha Ponds in Middleborough on Monday, June 1 at 10:30 AM.

Originally, known as the Plymouth Red-belly turtle, Northern Red-bellied Cooters are classified as endangered species at both the state and federal level. These turtles are Massachusetts's second largest freshwater turtle, behind the snapper, measuring up to 12 inches in shell length and reaching weights of up to 10 pounds. They are only found in the Plymouth County region of southeastern Massachusetts, completely isolated from other populations found in the mid-Atlantic states. They are named for their coral-red plastron (underbelly of shell).

Only a few hundred adult red-bellied cooters were believed to exist in the Commonwealth in 1984. Low survival rates of eggs and hatchlings are a factor limiting the species' population. Turtle nests are plundered by scavenging raccoons and skunks, while quarter-sized hatchlings emerging in late summer face a gauntlet of predators such as fish, frogs and wading birds, not to mention ever-encroaching residential development complete with kids, pets and cars, all of which spell death for the tiny reptiles.

Habitat management efforts have been initiated with area landowners on lakes and ponds where turtle nests have been located and protected. Over 2,000 turtles have been released through the Headstart program since its inception since the mid-1980's. At least three headstarted turtles are known to have nested in this time period.

For more information about northern redbellied cooters, see the following fact sheet:

[http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/nhosp/species\\_info/nhfacts/pseudemys\\_rubriventris.pdf](http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/nhosp/species_info/nhfacts/pseudemys_rubriventris.pdf)

### **DIRECTIONS TO RELEASE SITE IN MIDDLEBOROUGH**

Long Point Road, Middleborough: From Rte 495 take Exit 4 for Rte 105 south. Follow 105 through Lakeville center and past Assawompsett Pond on left and stay straight when Rte 18 turns to the right. Take left on Long Point Road and follow across causeway between Pocksha and Great Quittacas ponds to meeting/release site.

**CONTACT:** Peter Mirick or Marion Larson, MassWildlife, 508/389-6300

### **LIST OF TURTLE COOPERATORS**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Contact</b>	<b>Phone</b>
Andover High School, Andover	Steve Sousa	978 623-8617
Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield	Scott Jervas	413 443-7171 x 39
Buttonwood Park Zoo, New Bedford	Shara Crook Michelle Sims DVM	508 991-6178 x 12
Dighton Middle School, Dighton	Carol Richard	508 669-4200
Eagle Hill School, Hardwick	Andrew Ward	413 477-6000 x 519
Eastern Nazarene College, Quincy	Jonathan Twining	617 745-3552
Essex Ag. HS, Middleton	Charles Saulnier	978 774-0050 x 250
Kestrel Educational Advent.	Jessica Kagle	617 290-2258
Leominster High School,	Michelle Olivari	774 230-1791

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Leominster		
Minute Man Regional Tech School, Lexington	Terry Regan	781 861-6500 x 348
Museum of Science, Boston	Bunny Watson	617 589-0333
National Marine Life Center, Bourne	Joanne Nicholson Brian Moore	508 743-9888
New England Aquarium, Boston	Bill Murphy Brianna Howe	617 973-5240 303 506-2882 (cell)
Norfolk Aggie HS, Walpole	Diane Spain	508 668-0268 x 363
North Quincy High School	Geoff Hennessy	617 510-1456 (cell)
Phillips Exeter Academy, Exeter, NH	Chris Matlack	603 772-6999
South Shore Science Center, Norwell	Karen Kurkoski	781 659-2559
Thornton Burgess Society, Sandwich	Mary Beers Phil Kyle	508 888-6870 x 13
Triton Regional School, Newbury	David Taylor	978 465-8673
Upper Cape Tech HS, Bourne	Nichole Willey	508 759-7711 x 234
Worcester Tech. HS, Worcester	R.J. Anderson	508 751-7645
Zoo New England, Boston	Fred Beall	617 989-2052

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Westborough Field Headquarters 508-389-6300

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