

net. You might even spear one in your ice shanty while waiting for a pike to cruise by. An easy way to catch turtles is to trap them. Any of several different types of traps are very effective. If you cannot buy an ordinary, barrel-shaped turtle trap ready made, you can readily construct some, or have some made by commercial fishermen along the Great Lakes, to look like those in the pictures. If you start from scratch, the following specifications will help:

Net: 3-inch square mesh of #24 seine twine (large mesh permits small turtles to escape and is least harmful to passing fish).

Length: 4 to 6 feet from front hoop to back hoop.

Hoops: 3 to 5 per trap, each 30 inches in diameter; preferably made of 6-gauge steel wire with welded joints, although wood may be used.

Throat: Funnel shaped, 18 inches deep from front hoop to opening inside; opening 4 inches wide by 20 inches wide; corners tied by twine to middle hoop.

Rear end: Closed by pursing string.

Preservative: Copper naphthenate or net tar, applied to hoops and twine alike.

Stretchers: Wood or 9-gauge steel wire, 2 for each trap.

Coarse-mesh poultry wire may be substituted for the seine twine and, if this is done, 30-inch square frames of wood may be used instead of the hoops. It is recommended that you retain the shape and dimensions of the entrance as specified since it is easily passed through by turtles on the way in. You may want to alter the dimensions of the traps in order that they will suit the facilities you have for transporting them.

To set a trap such as just described, fill an old tin can with fish heads and entrails, with chicken offal, or with other such juicy animal remains. It is important that only fresh bait be used and that it be changed

every couple of days in traps that are kept constantly in the water. Punch several holes in the can and hang it, filled with bait, in the middle of the trap just inside the mouth in order to lure the turtles in.

The best places to trap edible turtles are in the soft-bottomed, quiet-water portions of lakes, ponds, and streams. The best sets for traps are often adjacent to beds of pond lilies where the water is not quite so deep as the trap. This is important if the turtles are wanted alive because if they cannot run their noses out of water to breathe air, they will drown in a short time. Visit the traps morning and night to remove the catch, adjust the set, and check the bait supply.

The season for turtle hunting in our State begins in late April and will extend into September. For the balance of the year, our aquatic turtles hibernate, apparently without feeding, and trapping is ineffective although they may be obtained by other means. At this time, searching in spring holes or in soft bottoms of waterways under the ice often is well rewarded.

The only license needed to operate turtle traps is an ordinary, valid, sport-fishing license. It is necessary, however, that you contact the Conservation Officer of the county in which you are going to work and have him approve your traps and the name tags on them. It is also well if the officer knows where you would like to trap. Chances are that he will also have some helpful suggestions for you.

Care of Turtles Caught

If your turtle hunting technique has followed that described, the turtles are alive when you come to take them from the trap. As a good conservationist, you return the smaller ones to the water and take only those larger than about 10 inches in length home with you. Transportation, even of large snapping turtles, is easily done in a burlap sack. Moisten the bag before putting your catch in it, keep it damp en route, and the turtles will be comfortable for

many hours. At your destination, your catch may be spilled out into a tub or a live box, and, if not too crowded, may be kept for many days in a few inches of water. Some care should be taken to keep the water from fouling. Feed the turtles on table scraps, both animal and vegetable, until you want to eat them. Handle snappers and softshells with care for they can bite hard and quickly.

Preparation for Eating

It is no job at all to ready a turtle for cooking; with a little practice you will find it easier than defeathering and dressing a chicken and will be able to handle any turtle in well under ten minutes. You will quickly develop short-cut methods, but the following is an easy way for a beginner. First, chop off the head and four feet so that the turtle can neither bite nor claw you. If you will lift his tail and hind legs off the ground, he will usually run out his head for the execution. Then, nail him belly-out by his tail to a fence post, tree, or side of the barn, and let bleed. With a sharp knife, cut along the back shell and then the belly shell (cuts marked x on diagram). Now cut around and under neck and tail (follow arrows on diagram). Pull the

(See published article for figure.)

skin off over each limb, neck, and tail, as in skinning out a rabbit. In snapping turtles the belly plate may be separated easily from the back shell by cutting exactly through the suture between the two with a knife. If you hit right on the line, the bridge between the two shells will cut like butter. If it cuts hard, look more closely for the precise lengthwise joint between the two shells. In other turtles than the snapper, a stout shears, hand axe, or small meat cleaver will readily part the two shells.

With all the skin removed and plastron loosened from carapace, cut away the belly plate by carefully slicing between the flesh and bone. The four quarters may now be easily claimed by cutting to disjoint them from the upper

shell and from one another. Before taking the fore quarters, slip out all of the insides of the turtle. Then take the neck and the tail and you have six sections of fine meat. If the turtle is large, go back for the tenderloins that lie along the backbone, one on each side behind the short ribs. If you do a good job, you will realize about 50 per cent of the starting weight of the turtle in meat. The shells may be scalded, horny plates flipped off, and the bone with attached meat fragments used for soup stock. Some people remove the giblets, particularly the liver, and consider them to be fine delicacies. Eggs in female specimens are also edible.

The portions of meat are quickly freed from fat (apparently important since the fat is reported to be very gamey in flavor) and may be cooked directly or soaked overnight in salt solution strong enough to float an egg. Some chefs like to add a tablespoonful of vinegar per quart of salt solution to further leach the flesh. If soaked in salt water, the meat must be washed before cooking. In either technique, no parboiling is necessary, but parboiling or pressure cooking will ensure tenderness.

Contrary to the oft-repeated statement that turtles have 13 different kinds of meat, you will recognize only two: dark and light. The quarters and tail are dark and the tenderloins and neck are light. The texture is fine, when properly prepared, and resembles high quality beef. However, the muscle fibers are long, and cross-cutting like beef steak improves eating quality of larger pieces.

The number and kinds of ways in which turtles meat can be cooked successfully is limited only by the cook's imagination. A few favorite recipes follow; these are in addition to the many soups for which turtle meat may be used as the basic stock.

Fried turtle: Brown the cleaned meat in fat, shortening, or butter. Pour off excess grease, season, add a few bits of onion, enough water to cover and simmer until the flesh begins to fall from the bones and is easily chewed

(be sure to sample, do not rely on "cooked" appearance). Serve hot or cold with relishes, potato chips, and beverage of your choice.

Turtle cutlet: Pound lean, boned turtle meat like cube steak, dip into egg batter, roll in meal, and fry in hot fat.

Curry of turtle: Cube a pound of turtle meat and brown in butter with diced onions. Simmer in a little water (or pressure cook) until meat is tender. Add 2 cups of diced potato and carrots, 1/2 teaspoonful of curry powder, salt, pepper, and continue to cook until vegetables are done. Serve by pouring over molds of cooked rice.

Maintaining the Turtle Supply

Turtles are a food resource and, since little legislation exists to protect them, those of us who like to eat them must work together in their behalf. Small turtles must always be returned to the water. The vicarious sport of shooting turtles off logs should be stopped, not only to protect the turtles but because of the hazards of shooting over water. Furthermore, turtles crossing highways should not be killed if this can be avoided. Studies have shown that turtles in general are not harmful to wildlife except sometimes at waterfowl sanctuaries and at fish hatcheries where they may be controlled easily. For this reason and because of their significance as food for man, the efforts of all sportsmen and others should be enlisted for the conservation of these animals.

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