

## TURTLE CONTROL IN FARM PONDS

James T. Davis\*

It is commonly believed that turtles eat the fish in farm ponds. Actually, turtles do not seriously affect fish populations. Recent studies indicate that the diets of most turtles contain less than 5 percent fish. These studies further show that most of the fish eaten are dead at the time turtles find them. But although turtles do not harm fish populations, they are often a nuisance to fishermen and sometimes need to be controlled.

At present there is no known method of completely eradicating turtles from a pond and keeping them out. A few turtles in a pond are beneficial because they act as scavengers and keep dead fish and other animals out of the pond.

### Control Methods

There are several methods of reducing the numbers of turtles in a pond. Shooting is effective, but can be very dangerous because ricochets may strike livestock or humans in the area.

Another method is the use of drop lines with the bait protected from fish by small cans. Any size small can can be used, but soft drink cans work best. Remove the

entire top of the can and punch a small hole in the bottom. Thread the fishing line through the can with the open end down. Tie a treble hook on the line and bait it with pieces of fish or other meat. Drop the hook into the water and fasten the other end of the line to a pole, tree or stout root. Adjust the length of the string so that the hook will be just below the water surface for catching slider turtles, or completely submerged for snapping turtles or soft-shelled turtles. The can will slip down over the bait and protect it from fish. Turtles will stick their heads up into the can and get the bait and the hook. This method is effective but time consuming.

Trapping is the most practical and efficient method of removing turtles from a fish or livestock pond. Submerged traps are needed for snappers and soft-shell turtles. Surface traps are most effective for slider turtles and other turtles that bask in the sun.

### Underwater or Submerged Traps

*Wire basket traps* are similar to fish baskets except for the size of the wire mesh and the size and shape of the funnel opening. The funnel should be oval, with the widest part parallel to the bottom of the pond. The opening should be large enough to permit large turtles to pass through. The basket

---

\*Professor Emeritus, The Texas A&M University System, College Station, TX

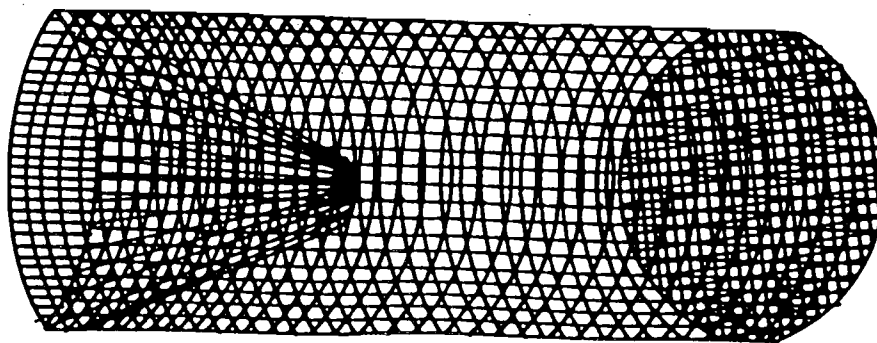


Fig. 1. Wire trap.

itself should be 3 to 4 feet in length and 2 feet in diameter. Heavy gauge welded wire is a good material to use. The mesh size may vary depending on the size of the turtles in the pond. From ½-inch to 2-inch mesh welded wire works very well in the average farm pond.

A door 12 to 18 inches square should be cut in the end of the trap opposite the funnel to facilitate removal of turtles and any fish accidentally caught. An easy way to construct this door is to clip the wire on three sides of the door. Then it can be wired closed. Usually wire basket traps are oval in cross section, which helps prevent them from rolling and makes it easy to find them again. Traps can be tied to the bank or marked with a float on a stout line.

*Slat traps* are usually constructed by nailing laths or lattice lumber about 2 inches apart to a frame made from 2x2's. The outside dimensions of the trap are not critical, but a convenient size is 4 feet long, 3 feet wide and 2 feet deep. A larger trap is too heavy and clumsy to handle and a smaller one is harder to set properly. Funnels are usually constructed in both ends of the trap. A door or removable section of the top side of the trap allows easy removal of turtles. The trap should be weighted to prevent from floating, and should be marked with a float or buoy so it can easily be recovered.

Either of the submerged traps is effective in catching turtles. Because the wire trap is lighter it is more convenient to lift and move. Slat traps and wire traps should be treated with a preservative for longer life.

Baiting of underwater traps is essential for success. The kind of bait is not important as fish, frogs, chicken entrails, cottonseed cake or soybean cake all give good results. Every 2 or 3 days bait should be renewed and turtles in the trap removed. Usually it is best to put the bait in perforated cans suspended from the top of the trap. The perforation permits the odor of the bait to flow out and still keeps the bait from being eaten or washed away.

Location of the traps is essential for maximum success. Place the traps near the

inlet of the pond in water depths of 3 to 4 feet. As soon as the catch starts to drop in one area of a large pond, move the trap to a new location.

## Surface Traps

*Log traps* are usually constructed from large wooden fence posts or small logs about 4 feet long. A framework of 2x4's or 2x6's is constructed and 20 penny nails are driven through the boards on 4-inch centers. These nails will stick into the center of the trap about 2 inches. Poultry netting, hardware cloth or welded wire is used to make a large basket about 2 feet deep. The basket is then fastened to a 2x6 frame. The logs or posts are fastened to the framework and act as floats. Turtles will crawl up on the logs to sun themselves and some of them will slide off into the trap. The nails will prevent them from crawling back out of the trap. Bait can be suspended in the middle of the trap to increase the catch.

*Tiltboard traps* are constructed by first building a frame of 2x4's or 2x2's. Creosoted or penta-treated lumber may last for several seasons. The size of the trap is not important; however, a trap 4 feet long, 4 feet wide and 4 feet deep is easy to handle and still large enough to hold many turtles. Cover the frame, except the top, with hardware cloth, poultry netting or welded wire. After the wire has been attached, the tiltboards are installed. These boards are usually 1x6's attached so that they will tilt or revolve freely. One way to insure this is to drill a hole in the center of the tiltboard. Twenty penny nails are then driven through the framework and fit into the holes in the tiltboards. Since the boards revolve freely on the nails, it is necessary to add a small weight to insure that the board normally remains flat. A bolt with weights on the end away from the board works very well.

Lead-in boards are then installed. These should also be about 6 inches wide and fastened to the frame with stiff wire. These lead-in boards should be maintained on about a 45 degree angle. If the angle is too steep, the turtles will not be able to make the climb. If the lead-in boards are not

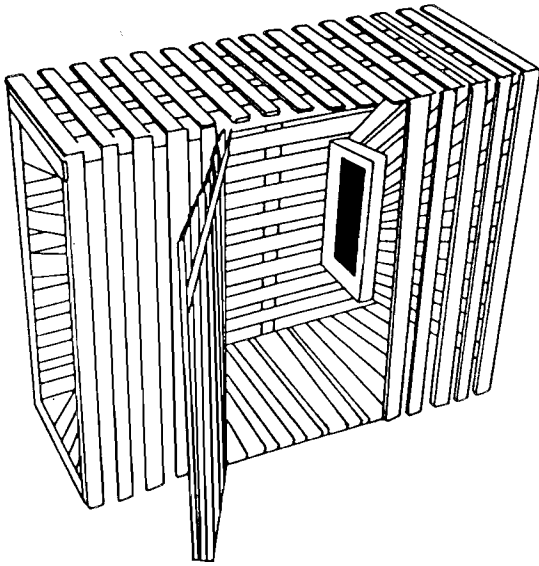


Fig. 2. Slat trap.

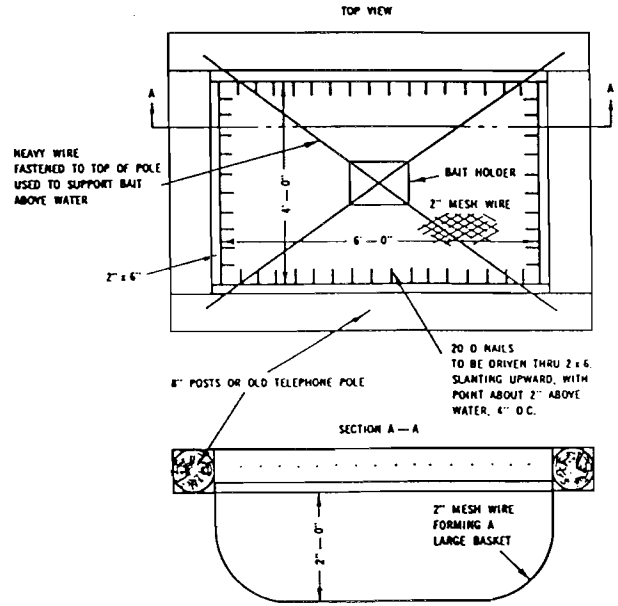


Fig. 3. Log trap.

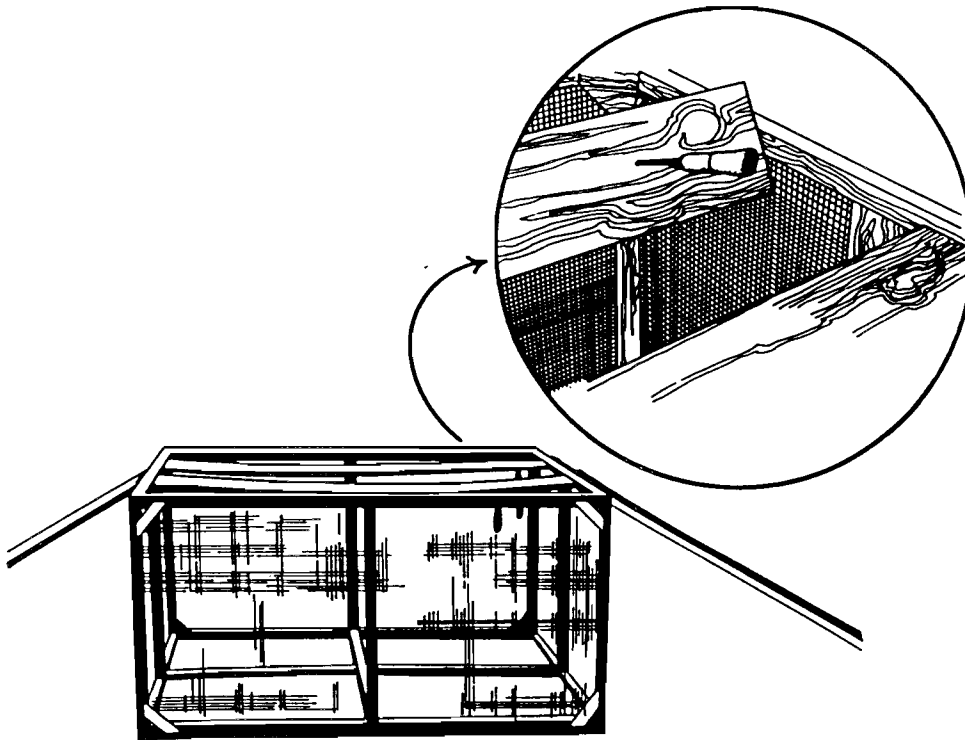


Fig. 4. Tiltboard trap.

inclined enough, the turtles will remain on them and not on the tiltboards which dump them into the trap.

The trap should be placed so that about 12 inches of the trap is above water level. For best results place the traps in the more isolated areas of the pond

Surface traps are most effective in ponds with few floating logs, stumps or islands. Tiltboard traps are more efficient than log traps because the logs become waterlogged and the trap must be removed from the pond to dry out. All surface traps should be removed from the water during the winter and stored under cover, as turtles are not active during colder weather.

### Uses of Turtles

Many people in Texas and Louisiana rate the turtle as a really fine meat. If the turtle is to be eaten, traps should be run daily. The turtle should be killed by cutting off its head. Hang the carcass by the tail so

the carcass can bleed out. There are two methods for dressing turtles.

(1) Turn the turtle on its back and cut through the skin of each leg where it is attached to the shell. Pull the skin over each leg and cut it off at the toes. Cut through the skin or shell holding the bottom and top shell together. Remove the bottom shell by cutting it loose from the meat underneath. Then remove the meat from the top shell.

(2) Dip the turtle in boiling water for 10 minutes. This will allow the top and bottom shell to be pulled apart. Skin out as above. There are many ways to prepare turtle meat – fried, boiled with vegetables as a stew, or made into soup.

***NOTE:** Some turtle species are protected by federal and state law. Examples include the "Alligator Snapping" and "Painted" turtles. Check with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department biologists if you are uncertain of the turtle species in the pond.*

### TURTLE SOUP

2 cups fresh turtle meat (diced)	6 bouillon cubes
bay leaf	7 cups of water
2 tablespoons lemon juice	

Bring to boil and cook until turtle meat is done. A dash of worcestershire may be added after soup is done. Sherry may also be added. Salt and pepper to taste.

### FRENCH TURTLE SOUP

Cut off head and feet. Place in boiling water. Rub skin off shell and legs. Eviserate and wash thoroughly. Place turtle (including shell) in a large pot and cover with water. Add celery, carrots, onions, salt, pepper and pickling spice. Cook 2 to 3 hours or until tender. Lift out meat. Strain the broth and then add ½ bottle of ketchup. When ready to serve, add flour browned in butter until thick and serve with slices of lemon.

### TURTLE A LA KING

Put 6 hardboiled egg yolks through a sieve and cream with 2 teaspoons of butter. Scald 2 cups of cream, add a dash of salt, pepper and nutmeg and beat in the creamed egg yolks. Add 2 cups of well-chopped, boiled turtle meat and cover. Cook 5 to 10 minutes and serve.

*Educational programs conducted by the Texas Agricultural Extension Service serve people of all ages regardless of socio-economic level, race, color, sex, religion or national origin.*

Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, The Texas A&M University System and the United States Department of Agriculture cooperating. Distributed in furtherance of the Acts of Congress of May 8, 1914, as amended, and June 30, 1914.  
10M—4-79, Reprint