

Research finds that a duck's boon might be a turtle's bane

November 3 2011



Dead turtles are removed from a downed duck nest box in a dried-up pool at Shaker Trace Wetlands. Credit: Denis Conover, University of Cincinnati

Duck nest boxes used to aid cavity-nesting ducks can prove to be turtle death traps.

That was the discovery made by University of Cincinnati Educator Associate Professor Denis Conover, of the Department of [Biological Sciences](#) in UC's McMicken College of Arts and Sciences, when he came upon a duck nest box in the wetlands of southern Ohio's Miami Whitewater Forest. The box had tipped over. Turtle corpses were strewn

about the mud and mire surrounding the fallen nesting box. Several species of turtles had been trapped by the box, and not all of them made it out alive.



This is a living snapping turtle that was removed from a downed duck-nesting box. Credit: Karen Cody

Conover's concern for the turtles' welfare led him and co-authors Wayne Wauligman and Karen Cody, a naturalist, to write "[Tipped Over Duck Nest Box](#) Traps Turtles in a Restored Wetland (Ohio)," to raise awareness about the problem of improperly maintained and monitored duck nest boxes. A slide presentation of the research will be displayed at the Kansas Herpetological Society's (KHS) annual meeting in Wichita, Kansas, Nov. 4-6, 2011.

Ordinarily a good thing, duck nest boxes—a nesting box attached to a pole in the wetland ground—are often erected in wetlands to provide nest sites for cavity-nesting ducks such as wood ducks and hooded

mergansers. In fact, duck nest boxes have been put up in many wetlands throughout the United States and Canada and have helped with increasing wood duck populations.

However, improper care of these boxes can have devastating effects on wetland turtles. Conover writes that "if a pole gets tipped over and the box gets into the water, these duck nest boxes can serve as death traps for turtles."

In Conover's case, the three species of trapped turtles—painted, snapping and box—are not endangered in Ohio. Still, other wetlands, such as the Beaver Creek Wetlands, Spring Valley Wildlife Area, and Cedar Bog, may harbor species like the spotted turtle which are much rarer. Such species may also be affected by overturned duck nest boxes.

Duck nest boxes are typically monitored and maintained during the winter or just before the breeding season, but Conover suggests that it "should probably be done more frequently." Periodically checking on duck nest boxes throughout the year can help reduce the dangerous and sometimes fatal consequences overturned boxes can have on turtles.

"Our goal is to reduce suffering and death of turtles by warning land managers about the threat to turtles that downed duck nest boxes can pose."

Conover recently finished an article titled, "Keystone Role of Beavers in a Restored Wetland (Ohio)," and has also published articles on control of Amur honeysuckle, deer management, woodland, wetland and prairie restoration, earlier flowering of wetland prairie plants associated with global warming, seed germination, plant/water relations, and ecological physiology of freshwater clams.

Over the years Conover has conducted many botanical surveys for

various park districts and conservation groups such as Oxbow, Inc. and the Bergamo Center at Mount Saint John Nature Preserve. He is currently doing a vascular plant survey at Campbell Lakes Preserve for the Hamilton County Park District.

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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