

New Species Appears at Sanctuary

On a warm evening in mid-June, while prowling the water's edge to catch animals on videotape, interns Joe Sage and Greg Bulté found a female Diamondback Terrapin nesting behind the boating shed at the River Farm. Because the Diamondback (*Malaclemys terrapin terrapin*) inhabits brackish waters bordered by salt marshes, its presence in the freshwater portion of the Patuxent was a surprise.

The turtle dug a nest in an area of loose clay where a new septic system had recently been installed. Sage watched as the turtle excavated a hole and deposited eggs, sitting slightly to one side of the hole with one foot dangling into the cavity. As each egg was deposited, she used her foot to guide the egg into the hole and position the egg in the nest. Once the eggs were deposited, the female stuck both feet into the hole and began scraping dirt, then balled her feet into "fists" and compacted the dirt with a gentle pounding. At about 10 p.m., she completed her work, covering the nest with dry dirt. "Had I walked by the area the next morning, I would not have known that



This turtle, discovered nesting in June, is the first Diamondback Terrapin ever seen at the Sanctuary.

a nest had been made there," said Sage.

The nest, which might hold from six to 18 eggs, is protected by a predator exclusion box. The eggs usually hatch within about 75 days, and hatchlings emerge throughout the fall. Staff members and volunteers are checking the nest daily, anticipating the Sanctuary's first known Diamondback Terrapin hatchlings!