DBT #2
Jennifer Taylor, Animal Care Coordinator

What a long haul this turtle was!

It arrived at Wild Care with several other cold stunned terrapins on New Year's Day. It was entered into our patient log as the 2nd patient of the year: DBT #2. The turtles were brought to us by Mass Audubon Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary's, Jess Ciarcia, Turtle Research Coordinator, who was out looking for cold-stunned sea turtles. There were a couple of very mild days at the end of December and some DBT's decided to come out of their brumation. This was Mass Audubon's theory.

He stayed still and appeared almost dead for several days in a 10-gallon tank with 1/2 inch of water. The turtle was circling to the left. Right foot sticking out forward with a minor wound on the foot. X-rays showed no fractures. We thought he was blind for a few weeks for not responding to sight stimuli. We began floating him with the other DBT's. Slow progress - baby steps. Would actively swim and then just "Shut down" and float. Staff and volunteers honestly thought he was dead, over and over. "Jennifer, he really does look dead". But fortunately, he was always alive, week after week after week.

The other turtles in our care had rear leg weakness, but their behavior was normal. They reacted to us and were aware of their surroundings. Swimming away from each other. #2 just floated and paddles aimlessly.

Eventually he stayed in the 75-gallon tank with the others. They were swimming and improving while #2 floated and paddled aimlessly. We were concerned that the turtle may have had brain damage. I read a lot about cold stunned turtles in general and found only information related to sea turtles. Something I found interesting was an acupuncture points chart for turtles. I used these acupuncture points to apply a tuning fork. (Something presented at a wildlife conference in recent years.) I was feeling desperate. Nothing ventured nothing gained. We did this therapy for months.

The females were all eating food. DBT #2 was not at all interested and had to be force fed. I did this by using a tool made from a yogurt container that looked like a guitar pick. Dr. Morgan our consulting veterinarian had us remove him from the tank with the females in the spring. If there was one thing that he might be able to normally, it was to mate. She was concerned that the females could become egg-bound because their rear legs were still not normal.

After the females were released and the weather was warmer, we changed our strategy and brought him outside in the sun to stimulate him. Everything changed for him the day he saw a bird fly over his head. I saw him duck when it flew over.

One week after my two work days off, I came back to Wild Care and he was like a whole new turtle. Instead of swimming aimlessly at the tank's water surface, he was swimming

against the glass wanting to get out! Normal terrapin behavior. He would look down from the surface, decide he wanted to check something out and dive towards it. He started walking around the floor of the tank nudging pebbles and sniffing for food.

It took seven months but we finally released him!

Everything changed that one day.