

Sea turtle found in strange waters - the Chickahominy River

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BY REX SPRINGSTON Richmond Times-Dispatch

Researchers looking for snapping turtles in the fresh-water Chickahominy River in Charles City County made a strange catch — a green sea turtle.

The green sea turtle, a tropical species, is uncommon in Virginia's salty waters and almost unheard of in fresh water, said J.D. Kleopfer, a reptile expert with the state Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

"This is one of the more unexpected captures I've ever encountered," Kleopfer said Thursday.

The turtle was just a few years old and about 16 inches long. Green sea turtles can reach 4 feet. They eat sea grasses and are harmless to people.

Ben Colteaux, a Virginia Commonwealth University researcher studying snapping turtles, and two assistants caught the turtle Tuesday in a trap-like net near the state Route 5 bridge, or Dresser Bridge, according to Kleopfer.



The turtle probably swam from the ocean up the James River to the Chickahominy, Kleopfer said. "It was probably just disoriented and lost, but it's hard to really tell."

"Usually when a sea turtle or any other animal shows up in a such an atypical habitat for that species, it's usually sick. But this turtle appeared to be in good health," Kleopfer said.

A rescue team from the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center in Virginia Beach took the turtle. The reptile was deemed healthy, given an identifying tag and released where it was found, said aquarium spokesman Matthew Klepeisz.

J.D. Kleopfer, a state reptile expert, shows off a green sea turtle that was unexpectedly caught Tuesday (July 7, 2015) in the Chickahominy River in Charles City County.