

[Terrapin Dogs]

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TERRAPIN DOGS

I once trained a collie dog to hunt rattlesnakes and his nose never fooled him. Later I found that my nose was "as good at finding the reptiles as was Spud's, the Collie. But I have never known of dogs trained to catch terrapin - and hold them with a paw until the master came and picked them up until I visited Plash's Store on [Bon Secour?] River some two years ago. Dealing in Redfish, Shrimp, Oysters and Terrapin, Mr. V. Plash has built up a comfortable business and it was with the greatest delight that I accepted an invitation to go terrapin hunting with one of the hunters who had three well trained terrapin dogs. Just mongrels - they looked like any ordinary cur dog whose ancestors might have been [Fiest?], [Dauchund?], Bull, Collie, Shepherd, Scottie, Police dog or maybe [Presbyterian?]. But they were valuable dogs. You shall see.

In this section dwells two varieties of terrain, famous for their flavor on the tables of America's famous four hundred. The salt-water terrapin ([Malachlayms?] Concentrica) and the chicken terrapin ([??]) are both lovers of the marshy waters of Bon Secour and kindred bays and lagoons. They both belong to the family EMYDOE but are fast disappearing. South Carolina and Georgia are also homes for these reptiles. Terrapins are distinguished by their horny back, a shield covered with eperdermic plates and partly webbed feet. Natives of tropical and warmer temperate countries they feed on vegetables, shrimp and

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crabs. They are found in this section in the tall marsh grass near most any of the salt, marshy or semi-marshy waters.

Ed Callaway, terrapin hunter and successful, led me on one of the 2 strange hunts. We wore hip boots, waded in the tall grass after the dogs and almost immediately the dogs began to bay. When we came up to them they each held a terrapin under their paw. Ed informed me that it was quite simple. Terrapin are particularly inquisitive. When a noise is [?] near one he starts right away to investigate. The dog sees or smells him and simply gets behind him and [rims?] him down with his paw until the master comes along and scoops him up, dumping him into a sack. A nice size terrapin weights three pounds. Ed sells them to Mr. Plush for fifty cents a pound. Sometimes Mr. Plash gets as much as \$1.25 a pound in New York, but he has to defray shipping expenses, stand for a probable loss enroute and many times keep them for months in the "crawl" because the market is not stable.

Well, we caught sixty-two before the morning hunt was over. Morning is the feeding time of terrapins hence mid-day and afternoon is no good. But we went on another kind of hunt also. In boats. One takes an oar, raps on the side of the boat, the terrapin swims to the top to see what the noise is about and the hunter scoops him up with a net. This method is not so profitable however because the greater number of terrapin feed in the marshes where one has to wade. Hence the dog. The dogs are taken care of too. They are really valuable to the terrapin hunters.

Terrapins are peculiar animals. They do not have to be fed to live. I have kept them for a year at a time without feeding them. Laboratory test show that they are still healthy and fat. They will eat, however at any time. They are warm climate inhabitants but I have frozen them in a cake of ice for three days and after thawing them out found that they were as lively as ever. They are cannibalistic. The babies have to get out of the way for the mothers will eat them immediately. They do - they make a bee-line for the water and can fend for themselves instantly.

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Mr. Plash keeps his terrapins for long lengths of time and necessarily 3 must have several "Crawls" located on the river - at the same water level. Here they are separated in three more crawls, the bulls in one, the heifers in another and the babies in a third division of the crawl.

Terrapins lay eggs three times during the spring and summer season, laying from 80 to 100 eggs in the sand which take six weeks to hatch. The baby is as large as an ordinary thumb. They are wide awake, sometimes vicious and always looking for trouble, being faster than the land terrapin or tortoise. They do not go farther than thirty miles north of Bon Secour in Alabama.

Few people wish to take the trouble of donning hip boots and slushing through the mush of a snake and alligator infested marsh. But the hunting is profitable when the market is stable. Terrapin soup is a delicacy. Natives, however, do not wish to be troubled with the killing and cleaning of them. In order to kill one the approved method is to put the terrapin on the floor, slip up /from behind if you can, with a two-pronged fork, slip the fork over his head before he jerks it back in the shell, then whack it off with a knife. There the trouble has just begun. An amputation [?] is necessary to get the delicious meat out of the shell - but it is worth it. The meat is always delicious.

1/4/1939

S.J.