

Experts concerned by sighting of invasive turtle

By Sylvia Lee Wingfield
The Associated Press

BOSTON — Two odd-looking Chinese soft-shelled marsh turtles typically raised for food in Asia have been seen south of Boston, and there's concern they could eventually threaten local ecosystems if they become established in New England.

New England Aquarium experts say it was possible someone decided to release the animals after buying them for cooking. They urge people not to release non-native animals into the wild, and to report any sightings of the soft-shelled turtle.

People on Wollaston Beach in Quincy saw a turtle digging in the sand, and the aquarium's marine animal-rescue team picked it up for identification. A second sighting was reported later.

"The concern is that if it can establish a population, it actually can survive our winter," said Nigella Hillgarth, the New England Aquarium's president and CEO and a zoologist. "It could cause major



changes in the ecosystem. None of the animals in that ecosystem are adapted to a predator of that size. It eats large amounts of small fish, mussels, clams, and insects." The turtles live in brackish marshes and ponds in eastern Asia. Hillgarth said they

TURTLE TROUBLE. A Chinese soft-shelled marsh turtle is seen in Boston. Two of the odd-looking Chinese soft-shelled marsh turtles typically raised for food in Asia have been spotted south of Boston, and there's concern they could eventually threaten local ecosystems if they become established in New England. (Charlie Innis/New England Aquarium via AP)

are considered endangered in the wild in China, but more than 300 million are raised annually on farms. The animals have become invasive in the Philippines, and have established themselves in Hawai'i, California, and Virginia. They have been seen in New York and Maryland.

Hillgarth says the "extraordinary-looking," greenish-brown turtle has a leathery shell and is between seven and 15 inches long.

"The thing that's remarkable," she said, "it has a really long snout, and can extend its neck. It's almost like a little periscope in the water that allows it to breathe. It has this pointy face, and you immediately know it's something very different."

Professor says he's grateful feds dropped case

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — A Temple University professor who had been accused of scheming to provide secret U.S. Technology to China says he's grateful and relieved prosecutors dropped the case against him, and is thankful to friends and colleagues who supported him.

Xi Xiaoxing (shee show-shing) released a statement calling the case a nightmare in which he "suffered professionally, mentally, physically, and financially."

The U.S. attorney's office in Philadelphia recently filed a motion to dismiss four counts of wire fraud against Xi.

The government says only that the motion is based on "additional information" it received since the charges against the 57-year-old professor were filed in May.

Xi was chairman of the university's physics department until his arrest. He remains a faculty member. He is a naturalized U.S. citizen born in China.

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