

one bug

one mouth

snap!

A Year in the  
Life of a Turtle

POEM SEQUENCE BY

Gail Sher

## CONTENTS

Spring

*1*

Summer

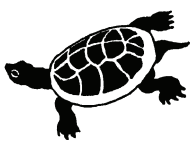
*38*

Autumn

*51*

Winter

*76*



SPRING

the swamp — its musty smell —  
airs in the  
crisp March wind

alders  
the  
above  
curly- cry  
cues your  
of tailing  
mist

absorbing the rain  
the quagmire sleeps...  
steeps in the morning sun

between the cries  
of a black-crowned night heron —  
the sound of unseen birds





burning off the morning haze  
a sunbeam spots  
the tip of her nostrils

beneath a layer of leaves  
in the pale light  
her plastron still

the sun shifts  
she shifts — then  
dives into the water

spring-green leaf-tips erase the sky



gilded yellow bars —  
also gleaming in twilit waters  
a male's eyes

locking forelegs and necks  
the pair  
counter-clockwise

silent night —

stars swim

a black and blue ocean

silence  
but for  
two shells  
grinding together  
in the dusk





afterwards

what's left of her tears<sup>1</sup> —

dark wet mud

*[Turtles sometimes shed tears  
as they lay their eggs.]*

tamping her nest  
she lumbers away —  
laden with dirt

stalking down the slope  
she vanishes in your shadows...  
softly blowing bluestem

one pink-white egg  
nestled in the earth...  
the moon



starless sky

nosing the flask-shaped chamber —

five flashes of white

groping, missing —  
a black-masked hunter  
rakes the twilight

fondling for a moment  
the morning sun —  
her barren nest

carnage over

tiny bits of sun-dried shells

wind and weather-beaten





shrouded in fog  
a tiny dinosaur  
inches toward dawn

across her nest's sandy ridge  
dragging her spiked  
inch-long tail

from broken shell  
to clump of bluestem...  
making a dash for it

kerplunck —

scurrying through the grass

then plopping in the water



morning sun —  
dozing on a mat of reeds  
a baby snapper

spinning orange and yellow  
through the sunny pool...  
little cooter, your spots

on a tuft of moss  
near a flowering cranberry  
eggtooth intact...

more strikes  
and afterwards...  
swirling pondweed





foraging the lagoon

a hatchling

choked by weeds

the shadow moves

the yearling...

freezes

under a pine  
and mounds of pine-needles —  
another mound

one bug  
one mouth  
snap!



smack of a jaw

slap of a tail...

silence

with whiplash speed  
plowing through the swamp  
lily pads stuck to his dome

hunt over...

a water lily

bobs in the waves

upside down  
caked with mud...a tortoise's  
sun-bleached bones





SUMMER

high and still  
on the milky horizon —  
summer clouds

steamy morning

lulling me to sleep — tree frogs —  
their rubbery croak

the afternoon purrs  
stroked by soft  
summery light

night falls —  
lying on a bed of leaves  
the moon



hot windless day  
even the song-sparrow's nest  
is deserted

a puff of cloud...

its trailing edge

in the quiescent sky

the heron stands...  
bakes  
in the hard dry air



circling the cove  
immense blue wings  
stir the stagnant ether

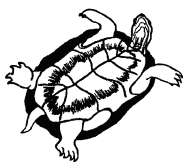


day in, day out —  
bull frogs and  
the echo of bull frogs

night, dawn,  
noon, dusk...  
will they ever stop

slapping them, grabbing them,  
swiping them  
out of my hair

landing on a spear of rush  
bending the rush —  
your rattling wings



AUTUMN

softly

on a barely-detectable north wind

a whiff of autumn

lowering sun:  
a few red leaves  
blaze in the pale grass



from blade to blade  
picking seeds  
from the toppled reedgrass

clear blue sky

warm winds crook

the deeply-yellow flower heads



drizzly day:  
darts and wiggles  
in the waterweed

a kingfisher's call  
through the shallow rain —  
riverbed deserted

no chirps  
no twitters  
just rain

oncoming storm —  
thunderous ghosts  
patrol the horizon



thunder —  
in one haywire jolt  
the forest's silhouette

one bolt

searing the landscape

white



thunderstorm over  
rainwater — its sound —  
seeping into the earth

thunderheads occlude the sky  
at dawn, at dusk...  
the moon's absent face



scorching

a no-longer-summer landscape —  
summer heat

hot restless wind —  
treading it  
with your fairy wings

she cocks her head —  
algae wave  
in the sunny floodwater

hot-purple bellies  
sinewy stems  
undulating in the heat



little water, no rain

one by one

exiting the marsh

without its yellow flowers  
bladderwort — deflated —  
splattered with mud



fingering  
the parched riverbed  
trickles ... then rivulets ...

even as you screech  
your imminent  
silence



your mournful call  
crosses my mind  
this wet cold morning

now

after they're gone...

their ceaseless cries

winging low

over a field

whose

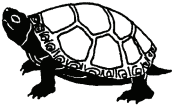
springtime

bluets

are

gone

frogs wait, birds wait,  
snakes wait...  
the season shifts



WINTER

pine needles laced with snow —  
between their clusters  
your departing V



cold air sinks — the hollows  
a black network  
of bare  
elm

roiling, tumbling,  
riding the winter wind —  
witch grass

darker  
colder  
each day  
arcing  
lower



more than wind

more than cold

rustles through the stiffening reeds

dusk —

a lone Canada goose

vanishes in the leatherleaf

brown leaves shrivel —  
pock-marked fruit  
fail to ripen  
in the weak  
October sun

not hawks

but wind —

the branchless saplings dead



mucky river

and you — eyes closed tight —

lodging among the roots



her breath stops —  
the frozen moor  
covered with night

winds howl

snow mounts

the wintry thicket...lifeless

under ice, under mud  
deaf to the whistling  
winter birds

Published by Night Crane Press,  
c/o Gail Sher, 700 Heinz Avenue,  
Suite 310, Berkeley, CA 94710

© 1997 Gail Sher

Design and illustration by Lory Poulson



The author wishes to  
acknowledge David M. Carroll's  
exquisitely delicate  
*The Year of the Turtle*  
(published by Camden House,  
Vermont, 1991)  
which informed and inspired  
these haiku-like poems.

