

Turtles



Ornate Box Turtle (*Terrapene ornate*)



Common Snapping Turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*)



Spiny Softshell Turtle (*Apalone spinifera*)



Stinkpot (*Sternotherus odoratus*)

DID YOU KNOW:

Turtles represent the oldest living group of reptiles on earth. Fossils dating from the time of the dinosaurs look very similar to the turtles living now. Several kinds of turtles are found in our area: box turtles, snapping turtles, hard-shelled and soft-shelled aquatic turtles.

EATING HABITS:

The box turtles dine primarily on grasshoppers, beetles and caterpillars, but mulberries, wild strawberries and other plant materials are an occasional treat. Snapping turtles are carnivores, feeding primarily on fish. The other aquatic turtles are omnivores; plants, mussels, crayfish, snails and insects all add to their diets.

THE YOUNG:

The female turtle finds an exposed area with loose soil or sand and digs a shallow hole for her two to eight eggs. She covers the eggs with dirt and lets them incubate on their own. The eggs hatch in two to three months. When the young are born, they already know what to eat and how to care for themselves.

HABITAT (HOME):

Turtles are found in all sorts of habitats in Missouri from oak-hickory forests and brushy fields to ponds, rivers and marshes. Though land turtles are slow-moving, their home range may be five acres! . The aquatic turtles and snappers are speedier, reaching speeds of ten miles an hour in the water. All Missouri turtles hibernate over winter. Box turtles dig themselves in below the freeze line and the water turtles burrow into the mud in the deepest part of their ponds.

DEFENSIVE HABITS:

When a box turtle is startled or threatened, it will make a hissing sound, pull in its head and feet, and tightly close its shell until it feels safe. Because they can't close their shells, water turtles depend on speed and aggressive behavior to protect themselves from predators.

UNUSUAL FACTS:

- The male ornate box turtle has red eyes and the female has yellowish brown eyes.
- The long neck and strange nose of the soft-shelled turtle are used together to make a snorkel. The turtle sits buried with just his head out to watch for a meal. He occasionally sticks his snorkel above water for a quick breath.
- River Cooters love to rest in the sun; sometimes so many of them like the same spot that they climb on top of each other into stacks of two or three.