



EASTERN BOX TURTLE

TESTUDINES

Family: Emydidae

Genus: *Terrapene*

Species: *carolina*



Range: central and eastern United States

Habitat: moist forested areas, marshy meadows, pastures and floodplains

Niche: terrestrial, omnivorous, diurnal

Wild diet: berries, leaves, tender shoots, small mammals, carrion and insects

Zoo diet: leafy greens, fruits, vegetables, crickets, mealworms and mice

Life Span: (Wild) up to 20 years, verified cases 40 – 50 years and unverified 100 years
(Captivity) 100 – 120+ years

Sexual dimorphism: male has longer tail; male has red eyes with female yellowish-brown eyes

Location in SF Zoo: Lion House

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

Common box turtles are predominantly terrestrial reptiles that are often seen early in the day, or after rain, when they emerge from the shelter of rotting leaves, logs, or a mammal burrow to forage. They are mid-sized, terrestrial turtles with a high, rounded shell that is dark with many yellow or orange splotches. The carapace pattern is variable and becomes less prominent with age. There are four toes on each hind foot. Males have a concave plastron (bottom of the shell) and often have red eyes. The plastron is hinged, allowing the box turtle to completely close its shell for protection, hence its name.

Weight: 0.6 – 1.6 lbs Carapace L: 7.8 in

STATUS & CONSERVATION

Box turtles are classified as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red list. Box turtles are included in CITES Appendix II. There is indication of a widespread persistent and ongoing gradual decline of *Terrapene carolina*. Causes of decline include habitat destruction, pollution and pesticide effects, direct mortality from vehicle strikes, decreased recruitment through increased predation (particularly of eggs and juveniles) by subsidized predators (raccoons, foxes, possums, crows), intentional removal of animals for commercial pet trade (ceased), as personal pets or for 'turtle racing' (ongoing), and possibly disease and vegetational / forest succession trends in much of the eastern United States. Box Turtles are in great demand for 'turtle races', and many animals are taken from the wild, raced, and if returned, often to another location, leading to stress, increased likelihood of vehicle strike, disturbance to established animals, and possible transmission of disease.

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

Box turtles avoid the heat of the day by sheltering under rotting logs or decaying leaves, in mammal burrows or in mud. In the hottest weather they frequently enter shaded shallow pools and puddles and remain there for a few hours to a few days. In the northern part of its range the box turtle enters hibernation in late October or November. In the Deep South it may remain semi-active throughout the winter. When entering hibernation these turtles burrow into loose soil, sand, mud or mammal burrows. They go deeper as the soil temperature drops. Their low metabolism enables them to live months without food.

If common box turtles do become too hot, (when their body temperature rises to around 32° centigrade), they smear saliva over their legs and head; as the saliva evaporates it leaves them comfortably cooler. Similarly, the turtle may urinate on its hind limbs to cool the body parts it is unable to cover with saliva

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

Courtship and mating occur in spring, summer and fall. During courtship the male walks in circles around the female while nipping and pushing at her shell. This process can take up to an hour. He then mounts her and hooks his toes into her plastron. Females can store sperm for up to four years. The nest site is usually in sandy soil. Young box turtles are chiefly carnivorous, but become more herbivorous with age. Young box turtles are extremely secretive and are seldom seen.

Incubation: 70 – 80 days	length at birth:
# of eggs: 3 – 8 eggs per clutch; several clutches per year	Sexual Maturity: 5 – 7 years

MISCELLANEOUS

Native Americans from the New York area used to eat turtle meat, as well as use their shells for ceremonial rattles and burying turtles with the dead.

There are six subspecies of box turtles, four in the USA and two in Mexico. Three US states name subspecies of the common box turtle as their official reptile.

Sources:

<http://eol.org/pages/1055222/details>

<http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/22028/0>

<https://srelherp.uga.edu/turtles/tercar.htm>

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