

## IDENTIFICATION

The wood turtle has a slightly domed carapace (top shell) that can reach a length of 9 inches. The scutes (scales) of the carapace are sculpted and knobby. The hingeless plastron (bottom shell) has a light color pattern with dark marginal blotches. The front legs and neck are often bright red or orange red.



Photo: Steve Kirchbaum

Note the sculpted scutes and more streamlined carapace



Photo: John White

Male plastron is concave in both wood turtles and box turtles

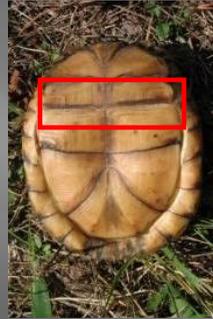
## CONFUSING SPECIES

The **EASTERN BOX TURTLE** (*Terrapene carolina carolina*) is commonly mistaken for the wood turtle. Box turtles have a high-domed shell and lack the sculptured scales. Their plastron is hinged with no markings and will often turn black. Unlike wood turtles, box turtles can completely enclose themselves for protection.

Photos: John White



Carapace patterns of box turtles can be highly variable



Note the hinged plastron

## THREATS

Turtles are unusual among vertebrates in that even extremely modest mortality from unnatural causes can lead to population decline. Habitat loss and degradation, fragmentation by highways, water pollution, and collection as pets are the primary threats to wood turtles. Highway mortality is one of the more horrid and immediate threats to wood turtles. Every year thousands of turtles are killed on highways as they try to find nest sites or look for mates. Other threats include an overabundance certain predators like raccoons, opossums, and skunks that prey of eggs, hatchlings and adult turtles.

## HOW CAN YOU HELP

Ultimately, the conservation of wood turtles will require protection of wetland *and* upland habitats. This cannot be accomplished without help of both private and public landowners.

Below are some steps that you can take to assist in wood turtle conservation:

- Raise the awareness on this species by encouraging your local and state governments to increase protection of riparian (wetland) habitats.
- Do not take turtles home. In many states wood turtles are a protected species.
- If you live next to a stream, provide as much forested buffer as possible.
- If you see a turtle in the road and can safely pull over, help the turtle across in the direction that it was going.
- Be careful when mowing tall grass, especially in June during the nesting season.
- Report suspected poaching to your local wildlife law enforcement agency as the wood turtle is protected in many states.

Wood Turtles are considered imperiled, rare, declining, and/or vulnerable in almost every State and Canadian province throughout their range.

## HELP US MONITOR WOOD TURTLES

If you encounter a wood turtle, send your name, address, phone number (optional), location of sighting (GPS coordinates if possible), name of nearest stream and comments to:

Address line 1 *this section is to be customized by each state to provide an appropriate mailing address*

✓ Your name

✓ Address

✓ Phone number (optional)

✓ Location of sighting (GPS coordinates, if possible), include county

✓ Name of nearest stream

✓ Comments

# Wood Turtle



Photo: J.D. Kleopfer

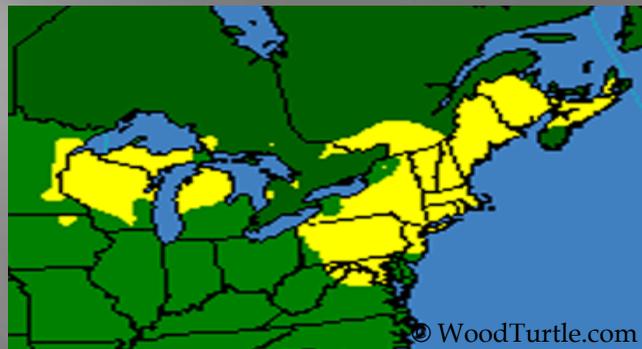
The **WOOD TURTLE** is in decline throughout most of its range and needs your help. This brochure is intended to provide facts and general information on the life history and ecology of this amazing animal, and how YOU can help with its conservation.



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## WOOD TURTLE RANGE

The **WOOD TURTLE** (*Glyptemys insculpta*) ranges from southeastern Canada south to northern Virginia. It also occurs in the upper midwestern States.



© WoodTurtle.com

## WOOD TURTLE ECOLOGY

Wood turtle life history is characterized by slow growth, late sexual maturity (10-15 years) and high natural mortality of eggs and juveniles. However, wood turtles are known for their longevity. In the wild, wood turtles are known to live 50 years and up to 100 years in captivity!

Wood turtles begin to emerge from their aquatic hibernation sites in March. In May and June, gravid females (females with eggs) can be found in upland habitat looking for nest sites. Although the number of eggs deposited is variable, most clutches average around 9 eggs. Hatchlings emerge in August or early September. Mating can occur anytime of the year when turtles are active, but typically peaks in late fall as turtles begin to return to their hibernation sites.

## WOOD TURTLE DIET

Wood turtles are omnivorous, meaning they will eat just about anything. Slugs, worms, mushrooms, and berries are just a few of the items that make up their diet.



Photo: Mike Jones

## WOOD TURTLE HABITAT

It is important to recognize that essential wood turtle habitat exists far outside of narrowly defined or protected riparian areas (wetlands). The adjacent upland habitat is as critical as the stream itself. Forests, fields, and wet meadows adjacent to highly oxygenated streams are excellent wood turtle habitat. In winter, they hibernate in pools deep enough not to freeze, under the mud or leaves on the bottom, or under submerged logs or tree roots. They do not occupy impounded waters, such as reservoirs and ponds.



Photo: Alan Savitzky

Wood turtle hibernation site

## WOOD TURTLE FACTS

- Wood turtles are cold-adapted. They have been observed moving beneath ice-covered streams and are active on land when air temperatures are only in the low 40s(F).
- Wood turtles have been known to “worm-stomp”. Thumping their chest against the ground, the sound draws worms to the surface for an easy meal.
- With their large strong legs, wood turtles are well-adapted for climbing over rocks and logs.
- Home ranges of wood turtles can be hundreds of acres.
- Wood turtle are considered the smartest of all the turtles species.

### For additional information on the conservation of wood turtles and other reptiles and amphibians:

- Habitat Management Guidelines for Amphibians and Reptiles of the Northeastern United States
- Habitat Management Guidelines for Amphibians and Reptiles of the Midwestern United States
- Turtles of the United States and Canada – Ernst and Lovich
- [www.northeastparc.org](http://www.northeastparc.org)
- [www.woodturtle.com](http://www.woodturtle.com)