



Eastern Box Turtle

Terrapene carolina carolina

Natural History

Description: Eastern box turtles are characterized by their dome shells which can close tightly to avoid predators by using a hinge at the bottom of their shell. They have slightly webbed feet, four toes on their hind feet and a slight hook on their upper jaw. Shell color and skin color vary between brownish or black with yellow or orange lines, spots or blotches.

Vocalizations: Box turtles can vocalize but do not do it very often. They may vocalize to get attention as babies or during mating. A “hissing” sound is produced when they breathe.

Breeding: Sexual maturity isn't reached until 5 and 7 years for these turtles. The mating season begins in May and occurs until October. Males usually mate with the same female over several years or multiple females. Females may have more than one batch of eggs and the average nest size is between 3 and 8. Incubation lasts 2 to 3 months and the sex of the eggs is largely dependent on the temperature the eggs are kept at.

Distribution: Box turtles in general are found all over North America but the Eastern box turtle is primarily found mainly on the eastern part of the United States. Their distribution stretches from southern Canada as far west as Illinois or Michigan and as far south as Texas in some cases.

Habitat: They prefer habitat with mixed forest with the floor of the forest slightly moist. They are terrestrial turtles and only visit shallow water when its too hot.

Diet: Box turtles are considered omnivores and eat small animals including fish, frogs, worms, snakes, insects, and birds as well as plant matter such as berries, fungi, roots and flowers. During the first 5-6 years, they are primarily carnivorous and as they age, they become primarily herbivorous.

Lifespan: While in the wild, some Eastern box turtles may live anywhere between 40 and 50 years old. The oldest Eastern box turtle in captivity was recorded at 100 years old.

Conservation Status: These turtles are listed as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List and are considered “special concern” in Michigan and Ohio. Although widely distributed, the population is declining.



Photo Credit By Savannah
River Ecology Laboratory