

Wood Turtle

Glyptemys insculpta

Natural History



CNC's adult Wood Turtle

Description: A Wood Turtle's brownish shell can reach 5 1/2—8 inches in length. Its plastron (underside shell) is yellow with blotched black marks along its edge. The skin on its' face and neck can range from yellowish to reddish-orange. The wood turtle gets its name from its shell, which resembles engraved wood. Each year a new scute grows under the old one, but unlike many other turtle species, the old scutes do not fall off.

Vocalizations: Wood Turtles may make a sound like a muted teakettle during courtship.

Breeding: Wood Turtles do not reach sexual maturity until they are 14-18 years old. In the early spring the male and female do a mating dance in which the turtles face each other and swing their heads back and forth. The female will lay only one clutch of 3-18 eggs a year, usually in May or June. The hatchlings emerge 47-69 days later and do not over-winter in the egg. Males have a concave shell for mating and a thicker longer tail.

Distribution: They are found only in northeastern North America in 4 provinces & 17 states.

Habitat: Wood Turtles live near streams, creeks and rivers. In the western portion of their range wood turtles are more aquatic, while in their eastern range they are more terrestrial. The turtles prefer heavily vegetated banks and sandy stream bottoms, however they can be found in woodlands and grasslands, yet are usually no further than 1/4 mile from water.

Diet: Wood Turtles are diurnal omnivores and will eat leaves, flowers, fruits, worms, insects and even carrion. They forage on land or in the water, but are slow feeders and are not good at catching fast prey. This species is known to thump the ground with its feet to simulate rain. This brings worms to the surface which the turtle then eats.



Lifespan: Wood Turtles can live to be over fifty years old in captivity! It is possible to estimate a young wood turtle's age by counting the rings on its scutes, however this is unreliable after a turtle stops growing, around 20 years of age.

Conservation Status: In Minnesota and Wisconsin, as well as in other parts of their range, they are considered to be a threatened species due to habitat degradation and habitat loss, illegal collection for the pet trade, road kills and increased predation.