Missouri's Turtles

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JIM RATHERT

Turtles and tortoises represent the oldest living group of reptiles on earth. Reptiles are a class of animals that includes crocodiles and alligators, lizards and snakes. Turtles are generally hard-shelled animals. They are known from fossils as far back as the Triassic Period—over 200 million years ago—and have changed little since they became established. There are currently more than 260 known species of turtles and tortoises in the world. Missouri has a total of 17 species of turtles, with several subspecies or geographic races that represent four different families.

The turtles of Missouri can be divided into one of the following three groups: hard-shelled aquatic turtles, soft-shelled aquatic turtles and hard-shelled land turtles. The hard-shelled aquatic group has the greatest number of species and includes some of the smallest species as well as the largest freshwater turtle. The soft-shelled aquatic group is represented by two species. The hard-shelled, land-dwelling turtles are represented by two species of box turtles; sometimes called "tortoises," they are actually closely related to pond turtles such as cooters, sliders and painted turtles.

Turtle shells have two main parts: upper and lower sections, called the *carapace* and *plastron*, respectively. The shell of most species is composed of bony plates covered by a layer of horny scales called *scutes*. Softshells, however, have reduced bony plates that are covered by tough skin instead of scutes.

Aquatic turtles have a variety of habitat requirements depending on the species. Some, like the red-eared slider,

Above: **This hatchling box turtle is one of two species of hard-shelled land-dwelling turtles.**
Left: **Turtles need to bask in the sun to increase their body temperature for digestion and assimilation of food and to expose their skin to ultraviolet rays which, in turn, produces vitamin D. Basking also helps female turtles to accelerate egg development.**

can live in nearly any natural or constructed body of water—as long as there is ample aquatic vegetation for both food and security, and suitable basking sites. The alligator snapping turtle, a declining species and the largest species in Missouri, lives in large rivers where adequate food (mostly fish) and cover (deep holes with root snags) can be found. The various map turtles thrive in headwater streams and the clear, cool rivers of the Ozarks where the turtles can find their favorite foods: snails, naiads and crayfish. Life on the land has allowed box turtles to have a diversified diet: insects, earthworms, land snails, mushrooms, berries and young shoots of various plants. Turtles do not have teeth; they were lost eons ago through the process of evolution. Both the upper and lower jaws are covered with a sharp-edged beak. The lower jaw fits inside the upper jaw, thus, allowing turtles to use their jaws like scissors to bite off bits of food.

All turtles lay eggs on land. Females are particular about where they lay and bury their eggs and may travel long distances overland to find a suitable location. Most turtles select well-drained, sandy or loose soil to deposit their eggs. The sites usually face south or southeast.

These map turtle eggs are on a bank along the Big Piney River. All turtles lay eggs on land.

Turtle eggs may be hard- or soft-shelled, round or elongated, depending on the species. Stinkpots, mud turtles and softshells lay hard-shelled eggs, which contains a large amount of calcium in the egg shell. Other species lay soft, leathery-shelled eggs with a proportionately lower amount of calcium in the shell. The largest species of turtles all lay spherical eggs: alligator snapping turtle, common snapping turtle and softshells. All the rest lay elongated eggs. Turtle eggs either hatch in late summer or early fall, or the young turtles may remain in the egg or nest all winter and emerge the following spring.

Common Snapping Turtle

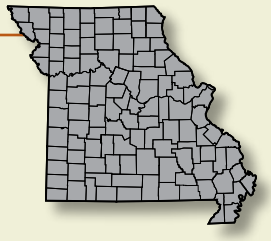
Chelydra serpentina serpentina

This common Missouri turtle is one of the most abundant turtles in the eastern half of the United States. Adult common snapping turtles range in upper shell length from 8 to 14 inches, and weigh from 10 to 35 pounds. This aquatic species is normally gray-brown in color, but the upper shell is often covered with mud or algae.

Common snapping turtles inhabit a wide variety of aquatic habitats: farm ponds, streams, rivers, swamps and lakes. Contrary to popular belief, this turtle is more of a scavenger than a predator and feeds on both animal matter and aquatic plants.

This turtle is economically important because large numbers are captured and eaten by people. In Missouri, the common snapping turtle is considered a game species; check the *Wildlife Code of Missouri* for current regulations.

Missouri Distribution: *Statewide*



Alligator Snapping Turtle

Macrochelys temminckii

This is the largest species of freshwater turtle in the world. The alligator snapping turtle can be distinguished from the common snapping turtle by the large head and pronounced hooked beak. There is a prominent row of keels on the upper shell. Coloration of the head, limbs and upper shell is dark brown; skin on the neck and other areas may be yellowish-brown. Adult alligator snapping turtles range in upper shell length from 15 to 26 inches, and may weigh from 35 to 150 pounds. The record weight is 316 pounds.

This species eats mostly fish and has an unusual ability to lure fish into its mouth. The tongue of the alligator snapping turtle has a special tip that resembles a worm, and the turtle uses it to attract fish close enough to capture and eat.

Preferred habitat of this species includes deep, muddy pools of large rivers, deep sloughs and oxbow lakes. This large reptile has declined in the waters of Missouri and is considered a rare species. It is unlawful to capture or kill the alligator snapping turtle in this state.

Missouri Distribution: *Occurs in the southern, southeastern and eastern sections of the state*

Snapping Turtle Identification

The common snapping turtle and alligator snapping turtle are similar species that are often misidentified. Since the alligator snapping turtle is considered rare in Missouri and is not a game species like the common snapping turtle, it is our hope that this information below will assist in correct identification of these two species. Conservation Department biologists would like your help locating alligator snapping turtles. If you see one, take a photo if possible and report it by writing to the address listed at the end of this booklet, attention herpetologist. —*Photos by Jeff Briggler*

Common Snapping Turtle

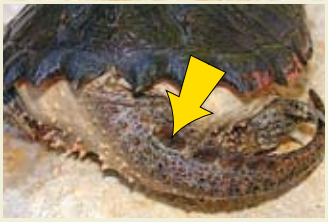
1) Top view of shell:
- Low ridges that follow the contour of the upper shell
- Ridges become smooth as the turtle grows older

2) Top view of head:
- Eyes can be seen from above

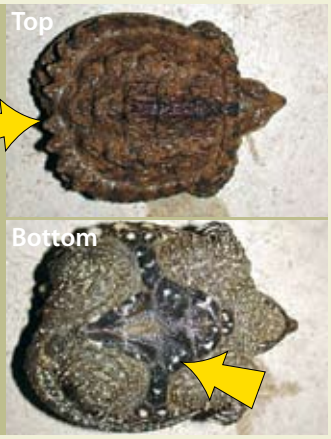
3) Side view of head:
- Smaller beak

4) Side view of upper shell:
- Single row of scales on side

5) View of tail:
- Raised sawtooth bumps



Hatchling
- Gray-brown color
- White spots on edge and bottom of shell



Alligator Snapping Turtle

1) Top view of shell:
- Raised, straight line rows of ridges

2) Top view of head:
- Eyes can't be seen from above

3) Side view of head:
- Larger beak

4) Side view of upper shell:
- Extra row of scales on side

5) View of tail:
- Round bumps

Hatchling
- Typically orange-brown color
- No white spots on shell

Yellow Mud Turtle

Kinosternon flavescens flavescens

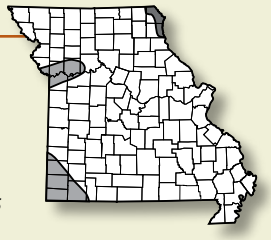
This is a small, dark-colored, semi-aquatic turtle with a restricted range and is considered an endangered species in Missouri. General coloration is dark brown to black. There is some yellow on the chin and neck and along the edge of the upper shell. The lower shell is normally yellow with some brown coloration along the scute seams. Adult yellow mud turtles range in upper shell length from 4 to 5 inches.

Illinois mud turtle

The yellow mud turtle prefers a sandy habitat and spends as much time on land as in the water. Aquatic habitat includes marshes, oxbow lakes and flooded fields. It spends the winter as well as the hot months of summer buried in the sand on land. It is presumed to eat a variety of aquatic animals and some plants.

The yellow mud turtle and its geographic race—the Illinois mud turtle—are protected as endangered species in Missouri.

Missouri Distribution: *The yellow mud turtle occurs in a few counties in southwestern Missouri and the Kansas City area. A close relative of this turtle, the Illinois mud turtle,* Kinosternon flavescens spooneri, *is restricted to a few marshes in northeastern Missouri.*



Mississippi Mud Turtle

Kinosternon subrubrum hippocrepis

A small, dark-colored turtle of the swamps of southeastern Missouri, the Mississippi mud turtle is normally dark brown or black. The lower shell is normally yellow with a rich mottling of brown. There are usually two wide and irregular yellow stripes along each side of the head and neck. Adult Mississippi mud turtles range in upper shell length from 3 to 4 ¾ inches.

This species may be found in or near swamps, sloughs, oxbow lakes and canals. It is most often observed in shallow water and seems to avoid flowing rivers. During the spring and summer, they are often seen crossing roads and highways. It eats a wide variety of aquatic animals and some plants.

Missouri Distribution: *Restricted to the counties of the Mississippi lowlands of southeastern Missouri*

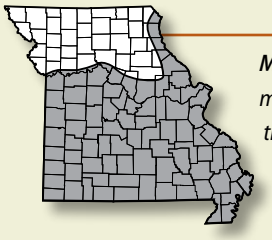
Stinkpot (Common Musk Turtle)

Sternotherus odoratus

This is Missouri's smallest species and one of the world's smallest turtles. The stinkpot is a dark-colored turtle with a domed upper shell and reduced lower shell. General coloration is black or dark brown; the lower shell is yellow with some brown mottling. There are normally two thin, yellow stripes on each side of the head and neck. Adult stinkpots range in upper shell length from 2 to 4 ½ inches.

The name "stinkpot" refers to the odor given off by this species when captured. The odor is produced by musk glands in the skin just below the upper shell along the sides.

Stinkpots may be found in a variety of aquatic habitats: streams, rivers, sloughs, swamps and large lakes. In Missouri, this species is most abundant in Ozark rivers. A variety of small aquatic animals are eaten by this small reptile.



Missouri Distribution: *Occurs throughout most of Missouri except for the northwestern third of the state*

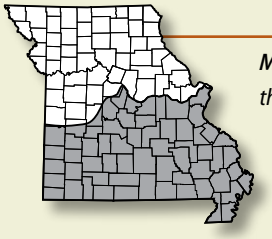
River Cooter

Pseudemys concinna

This large, aquatic turtle has a proportionately small, blunt head. General coloration is an olive-brown upper shell with numerous concentric yellow lines. The head and limbs are normally dark brown or black with many yellow lines. The lower shell is usually plain yellow, or it may have some faint gray markings on the forward section. Adult cooters range in upper shell length from 9 to 13 inches.

During the spring and summer, cooters spend a considerable amount of time basking in the sun on logs. The cooter is most abundant in Missouri's rivers and sloughs, but also has taken up residence in some of our state's large reservoirs.

Aquatic plants make up the bulk of this species' food, but some aquatic insects, snails and crayfish are occasionally eaten.



Missouri Distribution: *Presumed to occur throughout the southern half of the state*

Western Painted Turtle

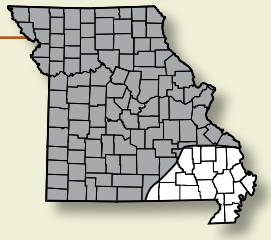
Chrysemys picta bellii

This brightly colored, small, semi-aquatic turtle has a smooth upper shell. General color is olive, olive-brown or nearly black. The upper shell normally has yellow, irregular lines and a reddish-orange outer edge. Head and legs may be dark brown or black and strongly patterned with yellow lines. The lower shell is red-orange with a prominent pattern of brown markings that follows the scute seams toward the outer edge. Adult western painted turtles range in upper shell length from 3 to 7 inches.

The western painted turtle spends much time basking on logs. In Missouri, this species may occur in slow-moving rivers, sloughs, oxbow lakes, ponds and drainage ditches. Habitat requirements include ample mud at the bottom, abundant aquatic vegetation, and basking sites such as logs or half-submerged rocks.

This colorful turtle eats aquatic plants, snails, crayfish, insects and some fish.

Missouri Distribution: *Occurs statewide, especially prairie regions, except for southeastern counties*



Southern Painted Turtle

Chrysemys picta dorsalis

This turtle has an orange or orange-red stripe running down the center of the upper shell and a plain yellow lower shell. The outer edge of the lower shell is often orange or orange-red in color. Adult southern painted turtles range in upper shell length from 4 to 5 inches and are the smallest painted turtle in North America.

This colorful turtle prefers still, quiet water of shallow swamps, streams, sloughs and oxbow lakes. Like the western painted turtle, this species requires numerous basking sites.

Aquatic invertebrates, such as snails, crayfish and insects, make up the bulk of southern painted turtle food, but some plant materials also are consumed.

The southern painted turtle is currently considered a geographic race of the western painted turtle, but may be recognized as a full species in the future.

Missouri Distribution: *Southeastern Missouri*

Red-eared Slider

Trachemys scripta elegans

This is one of the most common semi-aquatic turtles in Missouri. The color of the upper shell is olive-brown with numerous black and yellow lines. The lower shell is yellow with a large dark brown blotch on each scute. The head and limbs are dark green with narrow black and yellow lines. A distinct red or orange stripe is normally present on each side of the head behind the eye. Old males are often covered with an excess of black pigment that not only obscures the red stripes behind the eyes, but also the yellow stripes on the upper shell and skin. Adult red-eared sliders range in upper shell length from 5 to 8 inches.

This is another species that spends much time basking in the sun on logs or rocks. Red-eared sliders may live in a variety of aquatic habitats: rivers, sloughs, oxbow lakes and constructed lakes and ponds. Both aquatic plants and animals are eaten by this species.

JEFF BRIGGLER

Missouri Distribution: *Occurs statewide except for a few counties in extreme north and northwestern Missouri*

Western Chicken Turtle

Deirochelys reticularia miaria

This is a small- to medium-sized turtle with an oval-shaped shell and extremely long neck. The western chicken turtle is one of the rarest species of turtle in Missouri. The upper shell may be brown or olive, with faint, yellowish-brown lines forming a netlike pattern over the shell. The lower shell is yellow with some brown color along the scute seams. The head and limbs are brown or black with numerous yellow or yellowish-green stripes. The underside of the head and neck is plain yellow. Upper shell length of adults range from 4 to 6 inches.

This species prefers still to slow-moving aquatic habitats, including swamps, river sloughs, oxbow lakes and drainage ditches. It spends much time basking in the sun on logs with its long neck stretched out. This species is known to wander about on land. Due to habitat loss, the western chicken turtle is an endangered species in our state.

TOM R. JOHNSON

Missouri Distribution: *At one time the western chicken turtle was probably common in the swamps of extreme southeastern Missouri. Now only a couple of locations are known.*

Blanding's Turtle

Emydoidea blandingii

This medium-sized turtle has an oval-shaped, moderately high-domed upper shell and a long head and neck. The upper shell may be dark brown or black with many yellow spots or bars. The lower shell is yellow with a large, dark-brown blotch on the outer portion of each scute, and the forward third is hinged and movable. Head and limbs are brown and yellow; the chin and underside of neck are usually bright yellow. Adult Blanding's turtles range in upper shell length from 5 to 7 inches.

This semi-aquatic turtle may spend much of its time in shallow water along the edge of marshes, walking about on land or basking in the sun on logs. Preferred habitat includes natural marshes and river sloughs, but this species also may live in ponds and drainage ditches.

Blanding's turtles eat crustaceans and a variety of aquatic insects, snails, small fish and aquatic plants.

Due to limited numbers and a reduction of natural habitats, this species has been listed as endangered in Missouri.

Missouri Distribution: *Occurs in a few counties in extreme northeastern Missouri and one county in extreme northwestern Missouri*

Common (Northern) Map Turtle

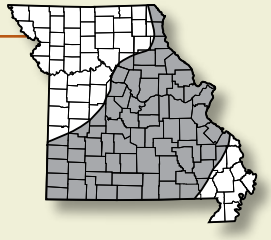
Graptemys geographica

Common map turtles are small- to medium-sized and have a low ridge along the center of the upper shell. The hind edge of the upper shell is strongly serrated. The upper shell normally is brown or olive-brown with a netlike pattern of fine yellow lines, giving the shell the appearance of a road map. The lower shell of this species is light yellow; the seams between scutes are dark brown. The head and limbs are brown with thin yellow lines. A small yellow spot is present behind each eye. Adult map turtles range in upper shell length from 7 to 10 ¾ inches.

Rivers, sloughs and oxbow lakes are the preferred habitats for the map turtle. This species will spend much time basking in the sun on logs or other objects, but will quickly dash into the water at the slightest disturbance.

Map turtles eat snails, naiads, crayfish and some insects. Female map turtles, which are larger than males, can crack the shells of mollusks and crayfish with their jaws.

Missouri Distribution: *Occurs primarily in the Ozark region of Missouri and upper Mississippi River in northeastern Missouri*



False Map Turtle

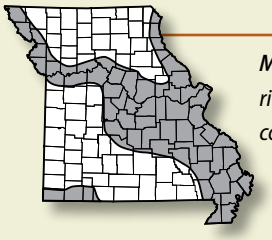
Graptemys pseudogeographica pseudogeographica

This medium-sized species has a low ridge along the center of the upper shell. The hind edge of the upper shell is strongly serrated. The upper shell is brown or olive with narrow, yellow, connected circles or lines. The lower shell is greenish-yellow with several light brown lines following the seam of each scute. The head and neck of the false map turtle is brown or greenish-gray with numerous yellow lines bordered by dark brown or black. The thick, yellow line behind each eye forms a backward "L" shape. Notice the "wide-eyed" or staring appearance of this species' eye. This is caused by the bright yellow eye with a round, black pupil. Adult false map turtles range in upper shell length from 3 to 10 inches.

Mississippi map turtle

This semi-aquatic species lives primarily in rivers, river sloughs and oxbow lakes or constructed reservoirs. It will often bask on logs or rocks, but is shy and will quickly drop off into the water at the slightest sign of danger. It eats both aquatic plants and animals such as snails, insects, crayfish and dead fish. A subspecies, the Mississippi map turtle, *Graptemys pseudogeographica kohnii*, is very similar to the false map turtle. It differs by a crescent-shaped yellow stripe behind the eye.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TOM R. JOHNSON



Missouri Distribution: *Primarily occurs in large rivers, such as the Missouri and Mississippi, and in constructed reservoirs in southern Missouri*

Ouachita Map Turtle

Graptemys ouachitensis ouachitensis

This is a small- to medium-sized, semi-aquatic turtle with a prominent ridge down the center of the upper shell and bright yellow lines on the head and limbs. The upper shell is brown or olive, with connected, yellow lines and circles. The rear edge of the upper shell is strongly serrated. The lower shell is plain yellow. The head and limbs are olive with numerous thin, yellow lines. There is a wide, yellow or orange-yellow marking behind each eye and a large yellow spot below each eye. Upper shells of adults range in length from 6 to 10 inches.

This turtle lives in slow-moving rivers, sloughs, oxbow lakes and reservoirs. The food of the Ouachita map turtle includes insects, worms, crayfish, snails, naiads, dead fish and aquatic plants.

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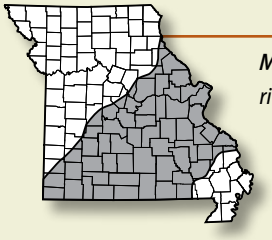


Missouri Distribution: *Presumed to be scattered in rivers and streams throughout the Ozark region*

Three-toed Box Turtle

Terrapene carolina triunguis

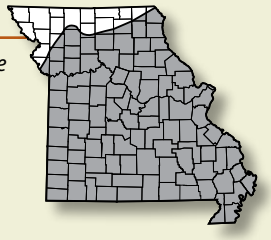
This small, land-dwelling turtle with a high-domed shell normally has three toes on each hind foot. Coloration of the upper shell may be plain olive or olive-brown with faint yellowish lines radiating from the center of each large scute. The lower shell has a distinct hinge across the forward third of the shell, which allows the turtle to close the lower shell up against the upper shell for protection. The lower shell is plain yellow with some brown smudges. The head, neck and limbs may be brown or black with a varied amount of yellow and orange, depending on the age and sex of the turtle. Although most specimens have three toes on each hind foot, some individuals may have four on each hind foot. Adult three-toed box turtles range in upper shell length from 4 ½ to 5 inches.

Daily activities of this species begin with a period of feeding, followed by basking in the sun in an open area. This reptile prefers a habitat of oak-hickory forest with numerous openings and edge areas along brushy fields. Young box turtles eat mostly insects and earthworms, but older turtles eat a large amount of plant matter.

Females lay from three to eight elongated, white eggs. One or two clutches may be laid per season.

Thousands of these reptiles are killed on our roads and highways by cars and trucks.

Missouri Distribution: *Statewide except for extreme northern and northwestern parts of the state*



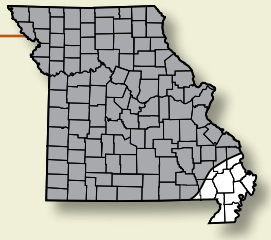
Ornate Box Turtle

Terrapene ornata ornata

This small, colorful turtle with a domed upper shell and a hinged lower shell is a fairly common resident of Missouri's grasslands and native prairies. The upper shell of the ornate box turtle is normally brown with numerous yellow lines radiating from the center of each scute. The lower shell is brown with distinct yellow spots and blotches. The head and limbs are brown or black with yellow spots and blotches. There are normally four toes on each hind leg. Adult ornate box turtles range in upper shell length from 4 to 5 inches.

This species resides in pastures, open woods, glades and prairies. Although insects make up most of this turtle's diet, a small amount of plant matter, such as berries and tender shoots, also is eaten.

Missouri Distribution: *Statewide, except for the southeastern corner of the state, and is more common in the western and northern parts of Missouri*



Midland Smooth Softshell

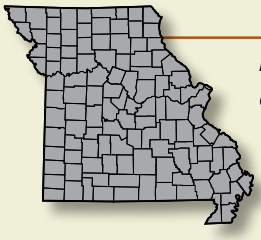
Apalone mutica mutica

This aquatic species has a round, smooth upper shell without scutes, extensive webbing on front and hind limbs and a long, tubular snout. General coloration of the upper shell varies with age and sex. Male smooth softshells and young have an olive-gray or brown upper shell with faint markings of dots and dashes. Adult females have a mottled upper shell with blotches of gray, olive or brown. The lower shell of this species is a plain cream color. Head and limbs are olive or gray above, and light gray or cream-colored below. A light yellow line bordered by black is usually present behind each eye. Adult male midland smooth softshells range in upper shell length from 4 to 7 inches; adult females range from 6 to 14 inches.

This turtle resides in large rivers and streams where sand or mud is abundant, and has been found in large oxbow lakes and constructed reservoirs.

Softshells eat a variety of aquatic animals including fish, crayfish, tadpoles, snails and aquatic insects. In the wild this species is no threat to game fish populations.

Due to channelization of rivers and loss of sand bars, the midland smooth softshell is likely declining in Missouri. This reptile is considered a game animal in Missouri, with a season and daily bag limit; consult the *Wildlife Code of Missouri* for current regulations.



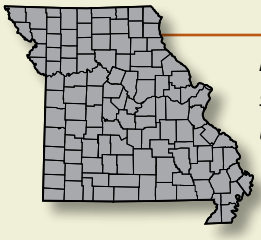
Missouri Distribution: *Presumed to be statewide, especially in large rivers*

Eastern Spiny Softshell

Apalone spinifera spinifera

This medium to large turtle has dark spots on the limbs, a small ridge on each side of the snorkel-like snout and numerous small bumps or spines on the front of the upper shell (see below). Coloration of the upper shell varies with age and sex. Adult males and young turtles have an olive or grayish-tan upper shell with distinct, small black dots and circles and a black line along the margin. Adult females have a dark olive or tan upper shell with brown and gray blotches. The lower shell is a plain cream color. Head and limbs are normally tan or olive with small brown or black markings. A yellow line, bordered by black, extends from the snout through the eye and along each side of the head. Adult males' upper shell length ranges from 5 to 9 ¼ inches; females' shell ranges from 7 to 17 inches.

This species resides in large rivers, lakes and large ponds. A muddy or sandy bottom is preferred. It eats a variety of aquatic animals, including fish, but is not a threat to Missouri's game fish population. This is a game animal in our state, with a season and daily bag limit; consult the *Wildlife Code of Missouri* for current regulations.



Missouri Distribution: *The eastern spiny softshell is found in the eastern part of the state, but intergrades and eventually is replaced by the western spiny softshell (*Apalone spinifera hartwegi*) in central and western Missouri.*

TOM R. JOHNSON

Missouri's Turtles and Conservation

The term conservation means the wise use of our natural resources. Natural resources have to do with more than our air, water, soil, forests, minerals and energy. How many people look upon a swamp or marsh and call it a valuable natural resource? For too long, most people have not considered special wildlife habitats as something to be valued and protected from destruction.

Although turtles have been around for many millions of years, their very existence may be in peril—not so much because of those killed by careless shooting or by a careless motorist. We have literally taken away or permanently altered their homes—the rivers, sloughs, swamps and marshes where they have lived for countless generations. Draining the swamps and marshes for agriculture, water pollution, stream channelization, the destruction of forests and strip mining have all added to the general decline of many of our native turtles. Without their natural habitat, our turtles, as well as many other wildlife species, are unable to reproduce and remain a part of the environment. To protect a species, especially rare and endangered ones, we have to learn their habitat requirements and protect that which is vital to their survival.

Because of lack of knowledge, some people have looked upon aquatic turtles as a lowly group with no value and a menace to fish populations and the sport of fishing. Research, however, has shown that turtles pose no threat to natural fish populations, that many Missouri species eat mostly aquatic plants and invertebrates, and that these animals have a proper place in the balance of nature. Turtles play an important role as a part of the check-and-balance system in our lakes and rivers and deserve a healthy environment and a chance to survive as much as any other creature.

Another threat to our turtle species is the continued plundering by thoughtless people. It is unlawful to shoot turtles in Missouri, yet people use basking turtles along our rivers for target practice. Taking the life of a non-

Natural wetlands, such as emergent marshes (*left*) in northern Missouri and bottomland cypress swamps (*above*) in southeastern Missouri, are important habitat for a variety of Missouri's turtles.

game animal for the sake of having something to shoot shows a lack of conscience, proper outdoor ethics and is illegal. Another impact on Missouri's native fauna involves the killing of thousands of turtles each year by cars and trucks. Far too often, motorists deliberately run over box turtles crossing roads or highways. Wildlife biologists in other states report that most kinds of wildlife populations are not severely affected by road kills—with the exception of amphibians and reptiles.

Missouri's turtle resource also has been damaged by people who take box turtles as a souvenir of the Ozarks and eventually, through neglect or ignorance, allow the reptiles to slowly starve to death while keeping them in their basements. Although Missourians are allowed to keep some species of wildlife as a pet without a special permit, it is usually harmful to the animal involved. If you are truly interested in keeping a turtle as a pet, you should learn as much as possible about their natural history and proper captive conditions required to keep them. Box turtles do poorly in captivity during the winter. Most people find it better to keep a turtle during the summer and release it in early fall in the same place where it was captured. However, box turtles and all native wildlife are much better off if left in the wild.

Several turtle species—softshells and the common snapping turtle—are considered game animals in Missouri and are highly valued as a human food source. A Missouri fishing permit is required for taking game turtles from the waters of Missouri. There is no up-to-date information on how many turtles are taken each year as game, but many people enjoy various recipes using turtle meat. Some folks enjoy soft-shell meat but would not consider eating snapping turtle. Others contend that there are seven kinds of meat on a turtle.

Spread the word: Do not intentionally run over turtles.

Recipes on how to prepare turtle meat are available in *Cy Littlebee's Guide to Cooking Fish and Game*. The book can be purchased at Department offices, by going online at mdcnatureshop.com or by calling the toll-free number 887/521-8632.

The majority of Missouri's turtles may have a life expectancy of 15 to 30 years, but there are some exceptions: box turtles are known to live 80 to more than 100 years, and a specimen of the alligator snapping turtle lived at the Philadelphia Zoo for 70 years. Giant, island-dwelling land tortoises have been reported to live more than 120 years.

JEFF BRIGGLER

Many species of animals, especially turtles, are accidentally killed by vehicles each year.

It should be the concern of all Missourians to understand and appreciate the many interesting and valuable animals and plants that help to make up our outdoor heritage. This legacy is both beautiful and fragile and will take all our efforts to preserve for future generations. The Missouri Department of Conservation has long been viewed as a leader in wildlife conservation. Since the passage of the Design for Conservation in 1976, we have and continue to conduct studies and programs to gather information on and alert Missourians to the status, value and needs of all our wild animals and native plants. It is our hope that these programs will increase appreciation for all wildlife and have the support and understanding of all Missourians.

Missouri Department of Conservation
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Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs of the Missouri Department of Conservation is available to all individuals without regard to their race, color, nationality, sex, age or disability. Questions should be directed to the Department of Conservation, P.O. Box 180, Jefferson City, MO 65102, (573) 751-4115 (voice) or 1-800-735-2966 (TTY), or to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Division of Federal Assistance, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Mail Stop: MBSP-4020, Arlington, VA 22203.

Front cover photo: Western painted turtles on a log, photo by Jim Rathert

TOM R. JOHNSON

Red-eared slider hatchling

Help protect Missouri's turtles

- Shooting turtles is prohibited.
- Turtles are no threat to game fish.
- Missouri has 17 kinds of turtles; all are protected as either game or non-game species.
- Only the common snapping turtle and softshells are considered game and may be taken by approved methods
- It is illegal to capture, sell or trade Missouri's turtles for the pet trade.
- Turtles are beneficial scavengers; they eat water plants, dead animals, snails, aquatic insects and crayfish.
- Swimmers should not fear turtles; they won't bite unless they are picked up.

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