



Eastern Box Turtle *Terrapene carolina*

Class: Reptilia
Order: Testudines
Family: Emydidae

Description/Variation

This turtle is a medium-sized land turtle with a high shell. Its pattern and coloration varies greatly. The carapace can be from dark brown to yellowish brown or orange with yellow to orange markings. The markings vary in shape from round spots to streaks or small blotches. The head and legs can be anything from plain brown to orange or yellow. The plastron is usually dark brown with a hinge near the anterior end. Males generally have red eyes and concave plastrons, and their carapaces flare out near the tail. Females have reddish brown eyes, mostly flat plastrons, and their carapaces do not flare out.

Natural History

Size: 4 1/2 to 6 in., record 7 13/16 in.

Habitat: Box turtles frequent a wide variety of habitats including wooded areas, fields, sandy areas, and other natural areas. They are often found in backyards.

Geographic Range: Northern peninsular Florida north to Massachusetts, and west to Illinois

Abundance: Common, but declining due to collection for the pet trade and habitat loss.

Longevity: Probably in excess of 100 years.

Reproduction

- **Strategy:** Oviparity (egg-laying)
- **Time of Year:** Breeding occurs around April, eggs are laid around June or July, and hatching occurs around August or September.

Behavior

Box turtles get their name from their ability to retract all four legs and their head into their shell. This is done when a threat is perceived, and is accomplished with the help of the large hinge at the front of the plastron.

Captive Husbandry

- **Substrate:** Cypress mulch or topsoil, or a mix of these ingredients works well.
- **Temp./Humidity:** The substrate should be kept somewhat damp most of the time, but can and should be allowed to dry out every now and then. Room temperature is usually fine for box turtles, although the temperature should be raised if a turtle is not eating well.
- **Lighting:** UVB light is very important, especially in juveniles. The turtle should also be provided with a basking spotlight. Care should be taken not to place the basking light too close to the turtle so it doesn't get too hot.

- **Food:** Feeding box turtles varies depending on the turtle's age. Young turtles should not be fed a lot of items containing protein, as their shells will then grow too fast and become deformed and wrinkled. As the turtles get larger, they can be fed more protein. The diet for juveniles consists of mealworms, nightcrawlers, crickets, and small salads of mixed fruits and vegetables. For adults, canned dog food, sardines, and chicken can be mixed in.
- **H2O:** Fresh water should be provided in a low-sided bowl. Tap water is fine.

Care Sheet by David Cooper and the North Carolina Herpetological Society