

# Connecticut Turtles

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With warmer temperatures, many animals have now come out of their winter quarters and are again active, especially on nice, sunny spring days. Connecticut's turtles survive the winter by brumating, the reptilian form of hibernation. Like other cold blooded animals, a turtle's body temperature adjusts to the that of the outside air. Cooler weather and decreasing day length sends turtles burrowing into the woodland soil, or into the mud at the bottom of a pond in autumn. After a long winter, turtles are again active.



Red-Eared Slider



Eastern Box Turtle



Eastern Painted Turtle



Wood Turtle



Spotted Turtle

## DID YOU KNOW

There are eight species of turtles that live in Connecticut, plus several sea turtles that can, on occasion, be seen swimming in the coastal waters of Long Island Sound.

A number of our native turtles are now on the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection's (DEEP) Endangered Species List because their populations have decreased due to habitat loss, mortality on the roads, and collection as pets. It is against State law to take these species from the wild.

Connecticut's rarest turtle, the bog turtle, is now close to extinction in the state, barely holding on in scattered wetland areas in the far northwest corner of the state.

Another turtle species, the red-eared slider, is becoming increasingly common in Connecticut ponds and lakes. Red-eared sliders are native to the south. They grow larger than and can outcompete our native painted turtles. These sliders are released pets and this turtle is now considered to be an invasive species, meaning that its presence may be harmful to the environment and to native species.

Turtles are long-lived, and some eastern box turtles can live to be over one hundred years old.

A turtle's upper shell is called a carapace, and its lower shell is called a plastron. A turtle's backbone and ribs are fused to the carapace. Although the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles may come out of their shells, real turtles cannot.

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A TURTLE AND A TORTOISE?

All tortoises are turtles, but not all turtles are tortoises. Huh? Tortoises live on land, whereas most turtles live in water, at least part of the time. A tortoise tends to have a high, domed shell, legs resembling an elephant's that allow them to raise their heavy bodies from the ground, and they have scales on their heads. Turtles tend to have flattened shells, legs that point out to the sides and, in many cases, webbed feet for swimming. They also have smooth heads and drag their lower shells on the ground when they walk. The eastern box, although it lives on land and has a domed shell, is a "terrestrial" turtle, and not a tortoise. Tortoises tend to live in sub-tropical or tropical climates and are totally herbivorous eating mostly grasses and leaves, whereas most turtles are omnivorous eating many kinds of plant and animal foods.



Musk Turtle



Common Snapping Turtle



Snapping Turtle

## LIFE CYCLES

Turtles dig a hole in ground and may deposit anywhere from half a dozen (box turtles) to several hundred eggs (sea turtles). Depending upon temperature, the egg may take anywhere from two to four months to hatch. Under cooler temperatures, the eggs take longer to hatch and most of the baby turtles will be boys. If it is very warm, the eggs hatch more quickly, and the majority of the hatchlings will be girls. Turtles hatching late in the season may overwinter in the nest, coming out the following spring. The baby turtles are no bigger than a quarter, but yet there is no parental care, and they are on their own from the time they hatch. Aquatic turtles (turtles that live in the water), will make their way to the nearest water body. If you

find a baby turtle, the best thing you can do for it, especially if it is on the road or near a heavily traveled area, is to hand carry it to the nearest water body and release it.

## WHERE TO FIND TURTLES

This is a good time to look for turtles sunning themselves on rocks or logs at the edge of the pond. Look for eastern painted turtles on any body of water from small ponds to large lakes that are not too deep, have aquatic vegetation, and plenty of basking spots in the form of rocks and logs. Common snapping turtles

may also live in this habitat, but they do not bask as often as do painted turtles. On occasion, a large snapping turtle may be found floating at the surface, enjoying the warmth of the sun. Spotted turtles live in woodland swamps, and musk turtles live in heavily vegetated ponds. Both are hard to find. Wood turtles live along stream and river corridors and spend their time both in and out of the water. Eastern box turtles are totally terrestrial and live on woodland edges. Finally, diamondback terrapins are our only brackish water turtles, living where salt water meets fresh along the Connecticut coastline, usually at the mouths of rivers that run into Long Island Sound. **NO TURTLES SHOULD BE REMOVED FROM THEIR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND, IN FACT, IT MAY BE AGAINST STATE LAW TO DO SO.**

To learn more about native turtles, visit:



To see and learn about exotic turtles, visit:  
Riverside Reptiles Education Center,  
132 South Road, Enfield, CT 06082

"<http://www.riversidereptileseducationcenter.com>"  
[www.riversidereptileseducationcenter.com](http://www.riversidereptileseducationcenter.com)

70 Gracey Road, Canton, CT 06019  
<http://www.roaringbrook.org>

