

Eastern Box Turtle

Terrapene carolina carolina



SPECIES OF SPECIAL CONCERN

photo-Tom Diez

General characteristics

Eastern Box Turtles are primarily terrestrial animals. Perhaps, it is the one turtle species most often seen in its range. Many people have had the opportunity to identify an Eastern Box Turtle, because it occurs in urban as well as suburban areas. It usually moves about in the early part of the day or soon after a summer rain. The Eastern Box Turtle reaches as much as 6 inches long as an adult.

Identification

The carapace (upper shell) of the Eastern Box Turtle is high-domed and keeled. Color and patterns vary greatly, but black or brown are probably most often seen, with markings of yellow, orange or olive. The sharply rising dome-shaped upper shell is a good identifying characteristic. The colors on the plastron ("belly" shell) are quite varied. Markings may range from yellow-orange to olive, on a tan, brown or black background. The plastron has a single broad, movable hinge that allows the Eastern Box Turtle to close it tightly against the upper shell.

It thus becomes effective protection from predators or other disturbances. The male usually has red eyes, and the eyes of the female are normally yellowish brown. The upper jaw ends in a down-turned beak.

Range

The Eastern Box Turtle inhabits an area encompassing a large segment of the eastern states. It extends from the lower New England states to Georgia and west to Tennessee and Illinois. The Eastern Box Turtle inhabits a large portion of Pennsylvania. It resides over most of the southern two-thirds of the Commonwealth. Its range in the west also reaches northward into the Lake Erie Basin.

Habitat

Although essentially a terrestrial animal, the Eastern Box Turtle enjoys soaking for hours at a time in wet mud or water. It likes moist, forested areas but does not insist on woodlands. It can often be seen in wet meadows or flood plains. During the hot, steamy months of summer, the Eastern Box Turtle actively seeks out a swampy area where it burrows in the cooling retreat of logs or rotting vegetation.

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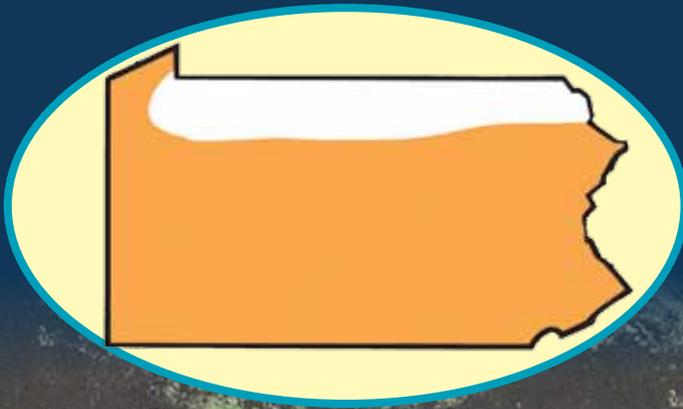
The Eastern Box Turtle matures in five to seven years. Nesting activity takes place in May to July when three to eight eggs are laid. They are elliptical and thin-shelled. The eggs, which average just over an inch in length, are placed in a deep cavity that may have been dug in the soft earth of a cultivated field.

Food

The Eastern Box Turtle is omnivorous and enjoys a widely varied diet consisting of all kinds of vertebrates, invertebrates and carrion. It also feeds on an assortment of wild fruits and berries. ☐



The eyes of the female Eastern Box Turtle are normally yellowish brown.

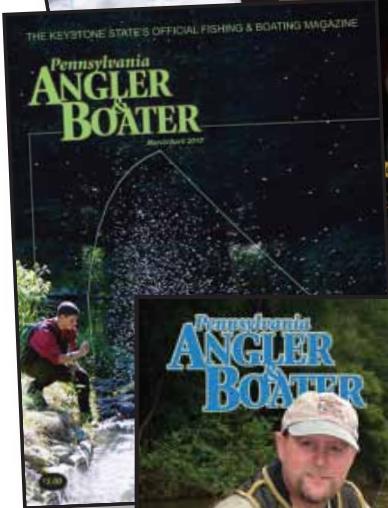
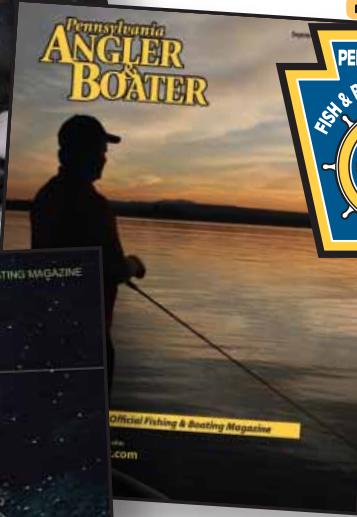
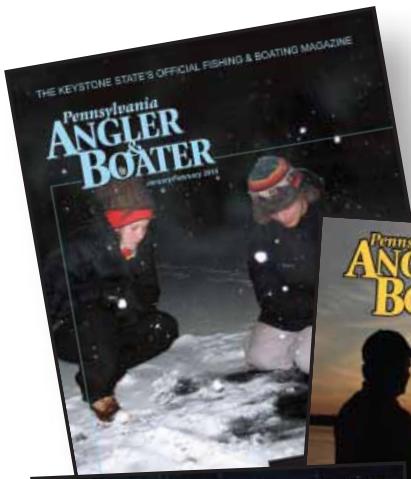


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photo-Joe Bartronis



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