

# Snapping Turtle

**Scientific Name:** *Chelydra serpentina*

**Class:** Reptilia

**Order:** Testudines

**Family:** Chelydridae



Snapping turtles frequently exceed a foot in carapace length with weights to 42 pounds. The record weights are 62 pounds in the wild and 86 pounds in captivity. The broad, flat carapace has sides that are parallel. The front and side margins are smooth with the rear margin being coarsely serrated. The shell of the young is very rough and becomes smooth with age. The head is large, flat, and triangular when seen from above. The mouth is very large, with jaw surfaces that are adapted for simple cutting. The neck is long. The bases of all four legs are extremely muscular, and the feet are webbed with long, thick claws. The carapace is brown and the plastron is yellow. The limbs are a drab gray-brown. Often a vague light area is found behind the eyes, and the jaws are marked with vertical dark streaks

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## Range

Their range includes the United States, Eastern Canada, and Mexico to Central America.

## Habitat

They inhabit freshwater lakes with soft mud bottoms and much vegetation.

## Gestation

Incubation: 9 to 18 weeks, depending on weather

## Litter

Clutch: Usually 25 to 50 (as many as 83) spherical 1-1/8" eggs

## Behavior

The snapping turtle is highly aquatic and spends most of its time on the bottom of relatively deep bodies of water. They also like to rest in warm shallows, often buried in mud, with only the eyes and nostrils exposed. Snapping turtles are highly aggressive. If picked up, the head shoots forward with great speed, and the mouth closes hard, often with an audible crunch, as the neck reaches full extension. As hunters, snapping turtles stalk their prey with a slow-motion walk, then grab the prey with an eye-blurring strike.

## Reproduction

Maturity is reached at 4 to 6 years. Breeding takes place from April to November, with most eggs being laid in June. The eggs are laid in a deep flask-shaped cavity. Each egg is directed into place by alternate movements of the hind feet. Females may travel to a nesting site some distance from water. In temperate locales the hatchlings will winter in the nest.

## Wild Diet

Invertebrates, carrion, aquatic plants, fish, birds, small mammals