

WOOD TURTLE

Glyptemys insculpta



Physical characteristics



The adult wood turtle has a greyish-brown upper shell measuring up to 25 cm long, with a serrated posterior margin. Its lower shell is yellow and may have dark or yellow markings. Its skin is generally brown, but its legs and neck often have orange, yellow, or reddish colouring. The wood turtle's upper jaw forms a downward-arched beak. Males are generally larger than females. The lower shell is flat in juveniles and adult females, but strongly concave in adult males.

Diet



The wood turtle is omnivorous. It eats plants, fruit, earthworms, slugs, and a variety of arthropods and carrion.

Habitat



Its preferred habitats are winding rivers and streams with sand or fine gravel beds. It also likes alder groves, open woodlands, and farm fields, usually meadows.



Periods of vulnerability



- The wood turtle is active between April and November (the months with the most sunlight), as it relies on the ambient temperature for thermoregulation.
- Mating usually takes place in the spring and fall, but may also occur throughout the active period.
- During the egg-laying period, from late May to late June, a turtle may lay between 3 and 20 eggs.
- This species hibernates in the water from November to March, depending on weather conditions.

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Threats



- Shell injuries caused by farm machinery—wood turtles that live on farmland are twice as likely to sustain a shell injury as those that live in forested areas.
- Collisions with mower blades, which are sometimes fatal for this species.
- Predators that live on or near farmland, such as raccoons, skunks, and other mammals.



Sustainable practices



- Create wide riparian buffers or buffer zones:
 - Stabilize banks that are too steep or show signs of erosion.
- Raise mower blade height:
 - It's recommended to raise forage cutting height to at least 15 cm to protect turtles.
- Adopt turtle-friendly mowing patterns:
 - Alternative mowing methods, such as working from the inside of the field outward in a circular pattern, give wood turtles a chance to avoid the path of farm machinery and seek shelter in nearby watercourses.
- Leave sand and gravel banks along watercourses in their natural state:
 - Sand and gravel banks are essential for egg-laying, and therefore vital for the species' reproduction.
- Locate nests and identify them with small flags or wooden stakes to avoid damaging or destroying nests and eggs when using farm machinery, for example.

- As of 2023, **threatened** species listed on Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act*
- Recovery strategy: wildlife-species.canada.ca/species-risk-registry/virtual_sara/files/plans/rs_wood_turtle_e_final.pdf

Sources

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