

Snapping Turtle

Chelydra serpentina

STATUS	Special Concern 	Not Listed 
Special Concern 	Vulnerable 	Not Listed 



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Species Description

The Snapping Turtle has a large, brown-grey shell that is saw-toothed at the back and often covered in greenish algae. It has a wide head, pointy nose and beak, and spiky tail. Hatchlings are dark grey and scaly. Full-grown adults can be over 40 cm in length, and can weigh over 10 kg. They are powerful and fast, and should be given their space!



carapace (back):
dark grey-green, smooth surface, jagged back



plastron (belly):
whitish, smooth, small

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Found throughout most of Nova Scotia, and the southern half of New Brunswick.



Habitat

Found in freshwater lakes, streams, rivers, and wetlands (marshes, swamps, bogs, and coves). It can also be found in brackish water wetlands. Snapping Turtles favour areas with muddy bottoms, slow-moving water and dense aquatic vegetation, including moss, lily pads, shrubs, and weeds. Females lay their eggs in June in exposed, gravelly or sandy areas, including road shoulders and lakeshores.



Roadside gravel nesting habitat



Summer wetland habitat

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Snapping Turtles are found in lakes and wetlands. Make sure to watch for nesting females on the roads in June.

Interesting Points

- Amazingly, adults can live to be more than 100 years old!
They have a lumbering, crocodilian gait, and truly look like dinosaurs!
- Although they will defend themselves if threatened on land, they are graceful swimmers and harmless in water.



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Hatchling in fall



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Similar Species

Four species of turtles are found in Atlantic Canada (none in PEI or NL):

Snapping Turtle:

Large size (up to 60 cm long); shell jagged at the back; spiky tail, large head; brown-grey colour with no red, orange or yellow markings.

Painted Turtle:

Small size (10-15 cm); low-domed shell; red-orange markings on shell and face; solid yellowish orange plastron; white outline around each top shell segment.



© DON CHENOFF

Wood Turtle (page 57):

Medium size (16-21 cm long); sculpted, bumpy shell; orange colouration around armpits and underside of shell and throat.



© NS DNR

Blanding's Turtle (page 55):

Medium size (20-25 cm); smooth, high-domed shell; bright yellow throat and chin; smile on face; yellow flecks on carapace.



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Threats to Survival

- Mortality from vehicles, sport fishing and deliberate persecution.
- Unnaturally high nest predation (typically a problem in dense human populated areas, which attract predators that eat turtle eggs).
- Legal and illegal harvesting of adults.
- Environmental contamination (chemical pollutants).



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Dead on the road, after being run over by a vehicle

How You Can Help

Learn how to recognize this species and give it the space it needs. Drive carefully and keep your eyes open for turtles on the road, especially in June. Take caution if approaching to help move off of the road (refer to page 56 for proper methods). In all other situations, observe and appreciate but do not disturb.



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Swimming gracefully

Moving hatchlings off the road

Contacts, Information, Sighting Reports & Stewardship Opportunities

Contact: NS DNR (902) 679-6091, or NB DNR (506) 453-3826

Info: www.speciesatrisk.ca or www.sararegistry.gc.ca

Sighting Reports: 1-866-727-3447 or www.speciesatrisk.ca/sightings