



Amazing Animals Fact sheets

Tortoises and Turtles

Turtles and Tortoises are common name for reptiles that make up the order Chelonia, (also known as Testudines), recognized by a hard shell that encloses the internal organs of the body. Turtles are ancient life forms. The earliest fossils recognized as turtles date from the Triassic period, about 200 million years ago; thus, turtles were in existence prior to the emergence of the great dinosaur groups. Unlike dinosaurs, however, turtles have continued to adapt and flourish.



Alligator Snapping Turtle

The alligator snapping turtle has three very distinctive ridges running along the length of its shell. Shell length can reach up to 66 centimetres long and fully grown adults may weigh up to 80 kilograms. They have an extremely long tail, which can measure as long as their shell. With their rather large head and sharp, beak like jaws, the alligators snapping turtle is a formidable aquatic predator.

Habitat

Alligator snapping turtles are found in the southeastern United States. They generally inhabit freshwater rivers, canals, lakes and swamps, preferring the areas of still water. Young hatchling turtles will live in smaller streams.

Diet

Both a hunter and scavenger, the alligator snapping turtle will eat fish, frogs, snakes, snails, worms, clams, crayfish aquatic plants and even other turtles. This turtle has a unique method of catching its prey. It will sit motionless on the bottom of the waterway, mouth wide open. They wiggle a small, pink, worm-like lure on the bottom of their mouth. This clever lure helps to attract their prey. Once the prey item is close enough, the alligator snapping turtle will quickly grab it with its powerful jaws. As these turtles are very patient hunters, it is not unusual for algal growth to develop on their shells due to their sedentary nature.

This growth can further assist their stealthy hunting technique by creating camouflage for the head and shell.

Breeding

Alligator snapping turtles reach sexual maturity between 11 and 13 years of age. Mating season is between April and June and during this period, the females will lay clutches of 8-50 eggs into a hole dug in the sand, usually 50 metres from the shoreline. The eggs are incubated in the sand for 100-140 days before the hatchlings emerge. The hatchlings look very much like the adult alligator snapping turtle and are independent from the moment they emerge from the nest.

Australia Zoo Alligator Snapping Turtle profiles



Lightning

Lightning is our largest alligator snapping turtle and the father of our four sub-adults. This big boy gets his name 'Lightning' for a reason. He doesn't particularly like anyone intruding in on him in his pond and he will very quickly chase you out. On the other hand if you are bringing him some nice juicy fish it is a totally different story. When Lightning eats he usually swallows the fish whole or slices them with his sharp, lightning-fast jaws. Lightning has lived here at the Zoo since 1985 and is very loved and respected. We are extremely lucky to have Lightning with us.

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