

Threats

ROAD DEATHS

The wood turtle's natural habitat is becoming increasingly scarce. Highway construction is one of the factors contributing to the problem. Because females are often forced to cross highways to get to their nesting sites, they face an increased risk of road death. Since roadsides are often exposed to sunlight and made of gravel or sand, females sometimes choose these precarious areas as nesting grounds, which puts them and their offspring at risk of being struck by oncoming vehicles.

SUBSIDIZED PREDATION

In addition to damaging and fragmenting its natural habitat, urban development and urbanization also artificially increase the amount of natural wood turtle predators such as red foxes, raccoons, skunks, crows, coyotes, and domestic dogs. These animals can prey on turtle eggs, juveniles, and sometimes even adult wood turtles.

ILLEGAL HARVESTING

As a slow-moving species, the wood turtle is at risk of being taken from its environment and kept in captivity as a pet. Because the wood turtle reaches sexual maturity late in life, adult harvesting has a significant impact on the decline of its population. Today, it is illegal to harvest any species of turtle native to Canada, including its eggs.



Photo: Scott D. Gillingwater

Things YOU can do to help

When enjoying the outdoors

- Keep your pet on a leash;
- Pick up your trash;
- Don't disturb wildlife (always observe it from a safe distance);
- Report any wood turtle sightings to national park staff or provincial authorities;
- Avoid driving ATVs in gravel pits or any other possible nesting habitat, such as sandy banks and islands along rivers and streams;
- If you suspect poaching activities, notify provincial authorities or park staff when you are in a national park.

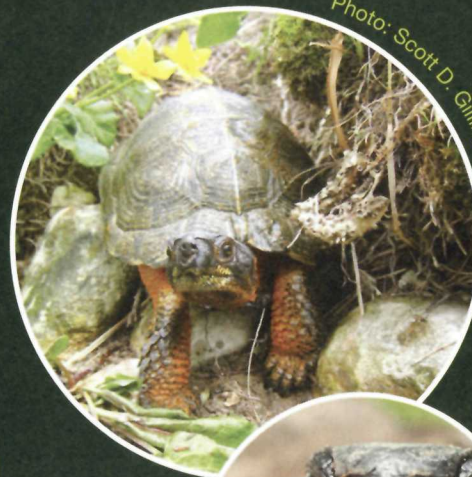


Photo: Scott D. Gillingwater



Photo: Patrick D. Moldovan

If you own a property

- Maintain vegetation zones along streams;
- Maintain speckled alder stands in old fields and along streams;
- Avoid draining beaver ponds during the winter season, as these can be used by wood turtles as hibernation sites.

DID YOU KNOW?

As an ectotherm, the wood turtle's body temperature varies according to its environment.



Kouchibouguac
National Park

WOOD TURTLE

GLYPTEMYS INSCULPTA

A SPECIES AT RISK



Photo: Jory Mullen

pc.gc.ca/kouchibouguac
pc.kouchibouguac.pc@canada.ca
(506) 876-2443

 KouchibouguacNP
 @KouchibouguacNP



Parks
Canada

Parcs
Canada

Canada

The Wood Turtle - A Species at Risk

Having been present since the age of the dinosaurs, some 175 million years ago, the wood turtle (*Glyptemys insculpta*) was once abundant in southeastern Canada and northeastern United States.

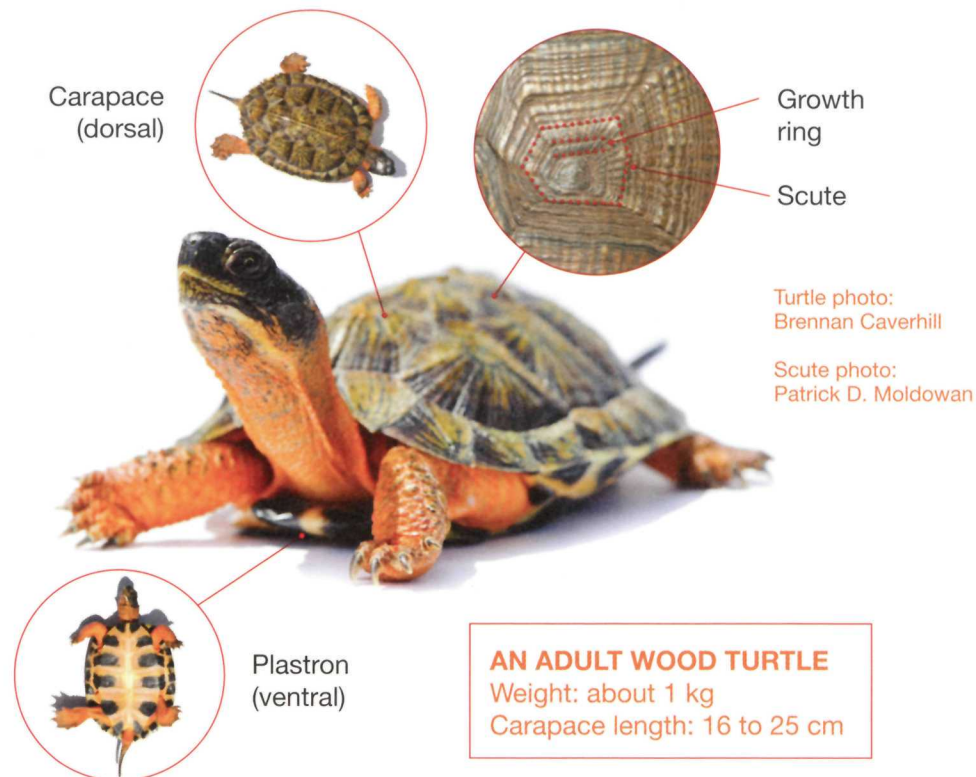
For Indigenous Peoples, the turtle (or Mikjikj, in Mi'gmaq) has always been of great importance. According to Indigenous mythology, the turtle represents Mother Earth since the great island of North America was created on its back. As a symbol of wisdom, longevity and perseverance, the turtle has been greatly valued and respected among Indigenous Peoples for millennia.

Unfortunately, this reptile's population declined rapidly at the end of the 20th century and the wood turtle is now listed as an endangered species. The main factors that led to its decline are road deaths, an increasing number of natural predators, the use of agricultural machinery, habitat loss caused by industrial and urban development, and poaching for the domestic animal black market.



Photo: Nelson Poirier

Description



Its carapace is greyish-brown to yellow in colour and is distinguished by its scales (scutes) that have annual growth rings consisting of pyramidal concentric ridges. The ventral part of the carapace (plastron) consists of yellow scutes with black blotches. The wood turtle's skin is mostly brown, but its neck and the upper part of its legs are more yellow, orange or reddish in colour.

DID YOU KNOW?

The wood turtle is an omnivorous and opportunistic reptile. It looks for food both on land and underwater, and is known to eat earthworms, slugs, soft leaves, berries, mushrooms and tadpoles.



Habitats

The wood turtle lives in its watersheds of winding rivers and streams that have either a sand substrate or sandy gravel bed, and good water quality. During its active season (i.e., when it's not hibernating), the wood turtle visits a variety of ecosystem habitats including riverbank alder thickets, deciduous and mixed forests, open woodlands, peat bogs, fields, and even beaver ponds.

Conservation efforts at Kouchibouguac National Park

REHABILITATION OF HIGHWAY 117

Highway 117 is a provincial highway with a 24-kilometre section through Kouchibouguac National Park. In 2015, this entire area was rebuilt.

In total, four underground tunnels were installed under the northern section of the highway to reduce the number of road fatalities. A 3.2-kilometre fencing system was then installed along this section, which interconnects the tunnels. This addition was crucial, as it guides travelling animals under and not over the road. Today, this infrastructure project is considered one of the largest amphibian and reptile conservation projects in Canada.

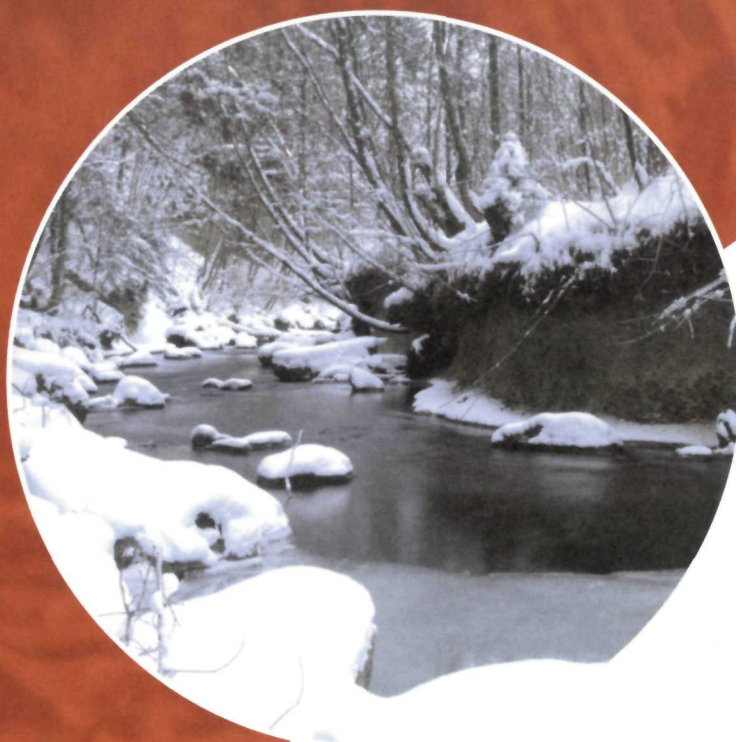
Initial studies helped identify the strategic locations where the underground passages were installed, and future studies are required to determine the effectiveness of the Highway 117 rehabilitation.

However, preliminary follow-up results confirm that amphibians, some reptiles and small to medium sized mammals are using these tunnels.

DID YOU KNOW?

Wood turtles can live for more than 50 years in the wild.





Hibernation period

5

To avoid freezing, wood turtles spend the winter alone, or in groups, buried in a hibernating site known as a hibernacula. These burrows may be located in the mud, under an overhanging bank or at the bottom of a well-oxygenated stream.



Photo: Scott D. Gillingwater

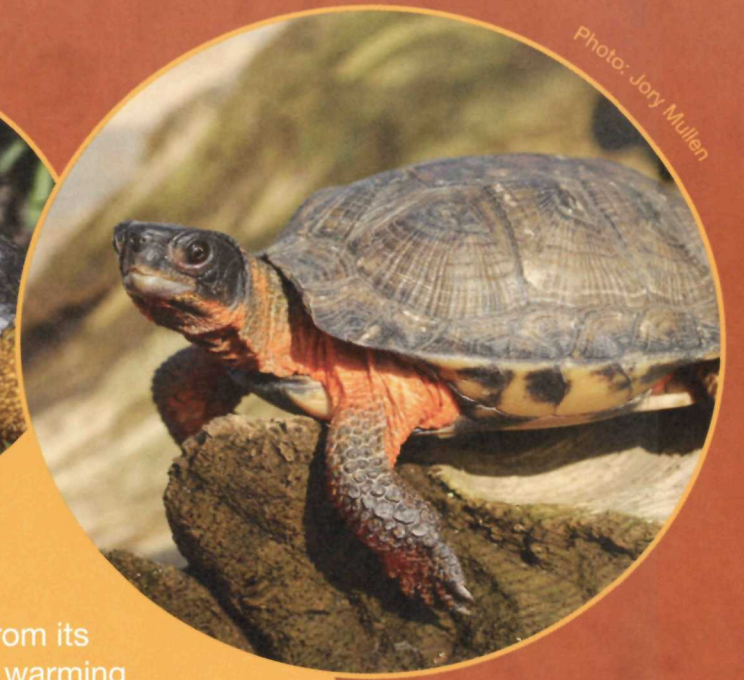


Photo: Jory Mullen

Awakening period

In mid-April, the Wood Turtle wakes up from its hibernation and spends much of its time warming up along sunny riverbanks. Famished, it also spends a lot of time feeding, especially in alder thickets.

1



Hatching Period

From the end of August to early September (i.e. 10-12 weeks after the eggs are laid), eggs hatch.

4



Photo: Jory Mullen



Photo: Scott D. Gillingwater

Life CYCLE

3

Nesting period

From late May to early July, females can travel more than 2 km to their nesting site. Because sun exposure and heat are essential for egg incubation, nests are often dug on beaches and sandy riverbanks.



Photo: Jory Mullen

Unfortunately, female wood turtles sometimes choose roadsides as nesting grounds, as they are often exposed to the sun and are usually made of gravel/sand. Having nests so close to vehicle traffic puts females and their offspring in a precarious situation.



2

Mating period

Although wood turtles can mate throughout their active season, it generally occurs during spring or fall.

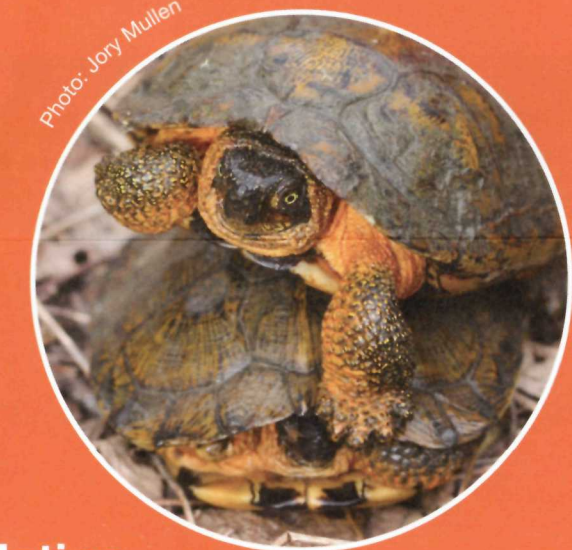
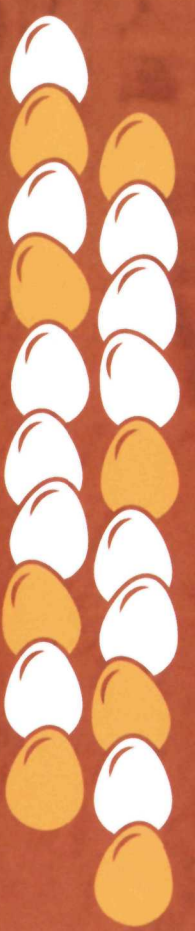


Photo: Jory Mullen

In the spring, females are capable of laying up to

20

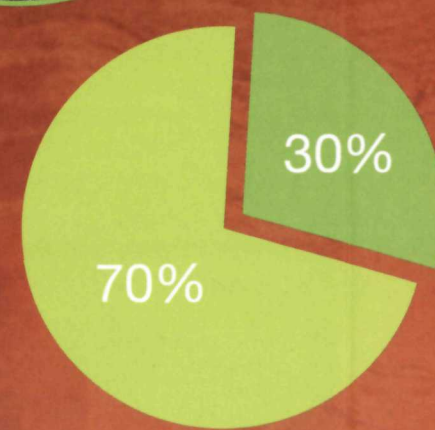
eggs, but average 8-12.



Only **ONE** in **100** hatchlings survives into adulthood, which is reached around 15-20 years of age.



We estimate there are between **6,000** and **12,000** **INDIVIDUAL** wood turtles worldwide.



It is estimated that

30%

of the global population is found in the provinces of Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia.