

Snapping Turtle

COOL FACTS:

Scientific name:	Chelydra serpentina
Average weight:	4.5–16 kg
Average length:	20–36 cm (upper shell)

PHYSIOLOGY

As Canada's largest freshwater turtle, the Snapping Turtle grows to an average length of 20-36 cm and can weigh from 4.5-16.0 kg. The most prehistoric-looking of all of Ontario's native species, the Snapping Turtle has a large black, olive or brown shell (which is usually covered in algae or moss), and triangular spikes along its tail. Hatchlings are about the size of a loonie and are smaller and darker than adults, with pronounced ridges along the length of their shell.

HABITAT/BEHAVIOUR

Snapping Turtles spend most of their lives in water. They prefer shallow waters so they can hide under the soft mud and leaf litter, with only their noses exposed to the surface to breathe. Not the strongest of swimmers, these aquatic turtles are usually observed walking on the bottom of small ponds and rivers or crossing roads.

During the nesting season, from early to mid-summer, females travel overland in search of a suitable nesting site. Snapping Turtles often take advantage of man-made structures for nest sites, including roads (especially gravel shoulders), dams and aggregate pits.

MORE COOL FACTS:

The Snapping Turtle spends so much time under water that algae grow on its shell; this helps them blend in with their surroundings.

Because of their size, they cannot fit inside their shell so they snap at perceived threats to protect themselves.

Lifespan in the wild is poorly known, but long-term mark-recapture data from Algonquin Park in Ontario, Canada suggests a maximum age of over 100 years.



What threatens them?



Snapping Turtles take 15 to 20 years to reach maturity. As a result, adult mortality greatly affects the species' survival. During the summer, many turtles cross roads in search of mates, food and nest sites. This is risky for turtles, as they are too slow to get out of the way of moving vehicles. Eggs in nests around urban and agricultural areas are subject to predators such as raccoons and skunks.