

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Look for it now in Southwest Ohio!

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Photos by Lauren Connolly

"Baby Snapping Turtle" by Dave Woehr

Common Snapping Turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*)

By Lauren Connolly, Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist

Weighing in at around 35 lbs., the common snapping turtle is the largest species of turtle in Ohio. They are seldom seen, however, because their preferred habitat is in murky water. Their favorite food can be found there—aquatic vegetation. They are omnivores, so they will also feed on fish or any decaying matter they can scavenge.

This time of year, snapping turtles are busy laying eggs. They have strong legs and sharp claws, perfect for digging in the dirt. These turtles can lay around 20 to 50 eggs at a time. Scientists believe that temperature at which the eggs in the nest are incubated will determine if the hatchlings will be male or female.

You may find a determined turtle crossing the road. The rule of thumb when helping any turtle across the street is to move it in the direction that it is already headed. Be cautious, however! The snapping turtle's beak-like jaws are powerful, and its neck is longer than you think! They are called "snapping turtles" for a reason! If you have to move a snapping turtle, use the wheelbarrow method: grab the base of the shell by the tail and lift the shell up, letting the turtle walk forward with its front legs.

To learn more about this species, visit [page 7 of the Ohio Division of Wildlife's Reptiles of Ohio field guide](#).

FUN FACTS

- Snapping turtle eggs look a bit like deflated ping pong balls.
- Many animals prey on turtle nests, including raccoons, skunks, foxes, great blue herons, snakes, bullfrogs, and large-mouth bass.
- The common snapping turtle can be found all the way from NE Canada to the southern tip of the Florida panhandle.
- As snapping turtles grow, their carapace (top portion of the shell) often becomes covered with mud and algae, aiding in their ability to camouflage.
- In the wild, they live for around 30 years. In captivity, they have been known to live up to 47 years.
- Their cousins, alligator snapping turtles, live in the southeastern US, and have more triangular heads, three pronounced spikes on their backs, and a worm-like "lures" for their tongues.