



## Snapping Turtle Information Sheet

**What is the snapping turtle's habitat?** Snapping turtles live in fresh water lakes, ponds, rivers, streams, marshes, and water-filled ditches. Quiet or slow-moving waters with a soft mud bottom and plenty of submerged plants are preferred. They stay in the water most of the time—either floating close to the surface or lying in the mud in shallower water (usually with only their eyes and nostrils sticking out). Snapping turtles come out only occasionally to bask in the sun or to lay eggs in the spring.

**Why are they called "snapping" turtles?** They are very aggressive when they are on land. They have sharp jaws that can deliver a strong bite. So we need to give them lots of space! They need to be forceful because they can't hide by pulling themselves into their shells—their bodies just don't fit. They also are too slow to run away when threatened.

**Why did the female turtle make a nest in the lawn near the parking lot?** In early June to mid-July, females usually choose a sunny site with soft, sandy soil to dig nests. Riverbanks, shoulders of roads, driveways, and lawns are common sites. The female uses her hind feet to dig out the nest.

**How many eggs do they lay and when will they hatch?** Female snapping turtles usually lay 20-40 pinkish-white eggs after they dig their nest. The eggs are spherical and look like ping-pong balls. They have a flexible shell that absorbs water from the soil. After the eggs are laid, the female covers the nest with soil and returns to her home. If they are not eaten by predators, the eggs will hatch in about 60 to 100 days (late August or September). The temperature during incubation determines if the hatchling turtles will be male or female. Lower temperatures (about 25°C) produce mainly males and higher temperatures (30°C or warmer) produce mainly females.

**What do the hatchlings look like?** Hatchlings are black and about 1 to 1.5 inches with very long tails. They have natural instincts to hide, and also give off a musky odor and "play dead" when touched. Even so, few survive to adulthood. Predators that eat hatchlings include herons, hawks, crows, large fish, raccoons, snakes, and larger turtles.

**What do snapping turtles eat?** Snapping turtles are omnivorous (they eat plants and animals). Their diet includes insects, worms, leeches, crayfish, snails, tadpoles, frogs, fish, birds, small mammals, carrion (dead animals), and aquatic plants. They have to eat most of their food underwater because they have a fixed tongue that makes it hard for them to swallow out of water.

**Why don't we see them very often?** Snapping turtles are nocturnal (active at night). But they do feed underwater during the day, ambushing prey.

**Where do the snapping turtles go in the winter?** When the weather gets cold, the turtles bury themselves in mud at the bottom of the pond to keep themselves from freezing. They may move a little during this time, but they usually don't eat.

**How long do snapping turtles live?** Snapping turtles usually live 30-40 years. As with all reptiles, snapping turtles grow throughout their entire life.

**Where in the world are snapping turtles found?** The snapping turtle is found in the New World from Canada to Ecuador.

**Sources:** [www.herpnet.net/Minnesota-Herpetology/turtles/snapping\\_turtle.html](http://www.herpnet.net/Minnesota-Herpetology/turtles/snapping_turtle.html)  
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