



## **REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS**

### **WOOD TURTLE**

#### **ABOUT**

The Wood Turtle (*Glyptemys insculpta*) is one of the only two turtles in the genus (closely related species), both of which are found solely in North America. It wasn't until 2002 that the Bog Turtle and Wood Turtle were granted their own distinct group. The carapace (shell) of the Wood Turtle reaches lengths of 6 to 9 inches with pyramid-like scutes (plates) that are clearly marked with growth rings. The bottom shell (plastron) is yellow with one large, dark mark on each plate. The head is black, sometimes with yellow markings. The rest of the skin is brown with variable yellow to red colors on the throat, neck, tail, and legs. This turtle was named because of the rich brown color of its shell looking like wood. The Wood Turtle is omnivorous (eating both plants and animals) and in place of teeth, has bony ridges on its jaws. Usually solitary creatures, they like to live near or in clear streams, rivers, and woodland ponds near forests. Adult males have a higher, narrower shell than females, and a tail that is thicker and longer. They are active for 5-9 months of the year, depending on weather and location. In winter they hibernate at the bottom of waterways where the water does not freeze, such as a hole in the stream bank, or among submerged, tangled tree roots. Some Wood Turtles have been seen "worm stomping" – a fast stamping of their front feet on the ground, which tricks earthworms into moving to the surface, where they are eaten.

#### **DID YOU KNOW?**

Wood Turtles range from eastern Canada to northern Virginia and are also found in southern Ontario, parts of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, with one isolated population in Iowa. However, in West Virginia they are threatened and only found in eight counties, including Morgan County. As with so many threatened species, the decline in population has a good deal to do with habitat destruction and human development. The Wood Turtle was once hunted for food and for its colorful markings, but is particularly threatened because of an illegal demand for the pet trade. The State of West Virginia Natural Heritage Program is constantly collecting information and monitoring this animal, and a specially appointed recovery team with the Fish and Wildlife Service uses this information to plan for the protection and recovery of the species.

For more detailed information visit: [www.sleepycreekwatershedassociation.org](http://www.sleepycreekwatershedassociation.org) or [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov).

#### **TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE**

What else threatens the Wood Turtle other than habitat destruction and human development?

- a) Hunting it for food
- b) Being trodden on by humans
- c) Climate change
- d) Illegal demand for the pet trade

Answer is D.

