



WOOD TURTLE
(*GLYPTEMYS INSCULPTA*)

VIRGINIA

STATE THREATENED



WOOD TURTLE

(*Glyptemys insculpta*)

Description

The wood turtle (*Glyptemys insculpta*) is a semi-aquatic turtle that is found from Canada to Northern Virginia (the southern limit of its range). It is considered uncommon in VA and is listed as a **State-threatened species**. Wood turtles are medium-sized turtles that range in size from 5-9 inches. The top of the shell (carapace) of the wood turtle appears sculpted, with scutes forming concentric shapes that resemble carved pyramids. The bottom of the shell (plastron) is yellow with black blotches and lacks a hinge (so it does not seal). Wood turtles have a bright orange neck and a black head and dark brown legs (with orange in the leg sockets).



Top of the shell (carapace) of the wood turtle



Bottom of the shell (plastron) of the wood turtle

Habitat

Wood turtles are intimately associated with the presence of a relatively undisturbed floodplain and a free-flowing perennial stream system with adequate nesting and basking areas. The wood turtle is known to occupy forested wetlands and marshy fields along the stream systems it inhabits, and some individuals may spend considerable time in upland areas, which can include successional fields, pastures, and agricultural areas. From fall into spring, the wood turtle generally occurs along clear, moderate to fast-moving streams (often within deciduous forests) where it hibernates in undercut stream banks, burrows, root masses, thick leaf packs, or occasionally in debris piles near water, or just lying on the bottom. Aquatic habitat with pockets of deeper, but flowing water with overhanging banks and snags suitable for overwintering sites are a life history requirement for wood turtles. Wood turtles do not generally occur in lentic water bodies (standing-water), and in winter, are almost exclusively found in and around clear streams with both high oxygen tensions and short or no freeze-over periods.



WOOD TURTLE

(*Glyptemys insculpta*)

WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND A WOOD TURTLE

If one of these turtles is found within the project area, it should be carefully removed to safety in suitable habitat (a run or deep pool with sandy or muddy bottom and submerged roots, branches or logs) within a major perennial waterbody. It is a violation of Virginia law to harm or keep a wood turtle for personal possession. Any person violating the law shall be guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor (a maximum 1 year in jail and/or up to \$2,500.00 fine) unless another penalty is specified. Please call the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) if you have any questions regarding this species:

DGIF Phone: (804) 367-1000

Website: <http://www.dgif.state.va.us/wildlife/information/?s=030062>

If a wood turtle is found on the project site, please contact VDGIF Herpetologist John Kleopfer at (804) 829-6703.

This relocation information provided courtesy of VDGIF.



Wood turtle floodplain habitat. Maryland, USA.

VIRGINIA TURTLES

OTHER SPECIES

Many species resemble the wood turtle, but these other turtles can easily be distinguished from wood turtles by physical characteristics.

EASTERN BOX TURTLE (*Terrapene c. carolina*)



HINGE



The Eastern box turtle is a terrestrial turtle that most resembles a wood turtle. It has an orange and black or yellow and black shell with concentric ringed scutes. Box turtles often have orange legs. The Eastern box turtle is found in wet, marshy areas or dry upland areas. It can easily be distinguished from the wood turtle because of its high-domed shell and its hinged plastron that completely seals the body of the turtle within.

COMMON SNAPPING TURTLE (*Chelydra s. serpentina*)



The common snapping turtle is a large aquatic turtle that is often seen on land when it is migrating to nesting sites. A common snapping turtle might be confused with a wood turtle because of its rough scutes, but its large size, thick skin, and saw-toothed tail help with identification. Do not handle a snapping turtle, it is capable of serious damage if it lashes out and bites you.

PAINTED TURTLE (*Chrysemys picta*)

The painted turtle is a small- to medium-sized aquatic turtle that is often observed basking on logs in streams and ponds. Painted turtles are quick to flee into the water upon your approach, so binoculars are helpful to identify them. Painted turtles have a smooth, flattened shell that is reddish along the margins and a distinctive yellow splotch along the side of the head.

