

# Snapping Turtle

*Chelydra serpentina*

**STATUS**

Special Concern 

Vulnerable 

57



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## Species Description

The Snapping Turtle has a large, brown-grey shell that is saw-toothed at the back and often covered in greenish algae. It has a wide head, pointy nose and beak, and spiky tail. Hatchlings are dark grey with a bumpy shell. Full-grown adults can be up to 60 cm long, and can weigh over 10 kg. They are powerful and fast, and should be given their space!



**carapace** (back):  
dark grey-green, smooth surface, jagged back

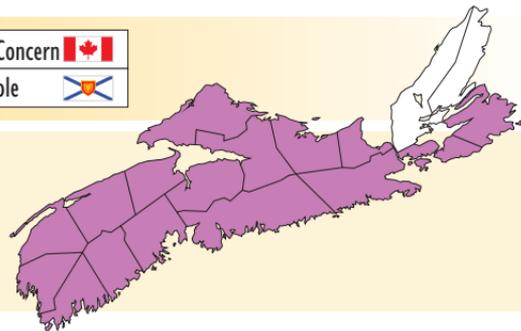


**plastron** (belly):  
whitish, smooth, small

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Found throughout most of Nova Scotia.



## Habitat

Found in freshwater lakes, streams, rivers, and wetlands (marshes, swamps, bogs, and coves), as well as brackish water wetlands and estuaries. The Snapping Turtle favours areas with muddy bottoms, slow-moving water and dense aquatic vegetation, including moss, lily pads, shrubs, and weeds. Females lay their eggs in June in exposed, gravelly or sandy areas, including road shoulders and lake and river shores.



Roadside gravel nesting habitat



Summer wetland habitat

© BRENNAN CAVERHILL

Snapping Turtles are found in lakes and wetlands. Make sure to watch for nesting females on the roads in June.

## Interesting Points

- Amazingly, adults can live to be more than 150 years old!
- They have a lumbering, crocodilian walk, and truly look like dinosaurs!
- Although they will defend themselves if threatened on land, they are graceful swimmers and avoid people in water.



Hatchling in the fall

© MEGAN CROWLEY

## Similar Species

Four species of freshwater turtles are found in Nova Scotia:

### Snapping Turtle:

Large size (up to 60 cm long); shell jagged at the back; spiky tail, large head; brown-grey colour with no red, orange or yellow markings.



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### Painted Turtle:

Small size (10-17 cm); low-domed shell; red-orange markings on shell and face; solid yellow-orange bottom shell (plastron); white outline around each top shell segment.



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### Wood Turtle (page 59):

Medium size (16-21 cm long); sculpted, bumpy shell; orange colouration around undersides of throat, limbs and tail; bottom shell (plastron) yellowish with black blotches.



© NS DNR

### Blanding's Turtle (page 61):

Medium size (20-25 cm); smooth, high-domed shell; bright yellow throat and chin; yellow flecks on top shell (carapace); bottom shell (plastron) yellow with black.



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## Threats to Survival

- Mortality from vehicles, sport fishing and deliberate persecution.
- Unnaturally high nest predation (by predators such as raccoons that eat turtle eggs), especially in areas of dense human population.
- Legal and illegal harvesting of adults.
- Environmental contamination (chemical pollutants).



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Female laying her eggs along the roadside

## How You Can Help

Learn how to recognize this species and give it the space it needs. Drive carefully and keep your eyes open for turtles on the road, especially in June. If you move a turtle off the road take caution and refer to page 62 for proper methods. In all other situations, observe and appreciate but do not disturb.



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Carefully and safely moving a Snapping Turtle off the road

## Contacts, Information, Sighting Reports & Stewardship Opportunities

**Contact:** NS DNR (902) 679-6091

**Info:** [www.speciesatrisk.ca](http://www.speciesatrisk.ca), [www.sararegistry.gc.ca](http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca)

**Sighting Reports:** 1-866-727-3447 or [www.speciesatrisk.ca/sightings](http://www.speciesatrisk.ca/sightings)

**Stewardship:** [Kejimmkujik.volunteer.keji@pc.gc.ca](mailto:Kejimmkujik.volunteer.keji@pc.gc.ca), MTRI: [info@merseytobeatic.ca](mailto:info@merseytobeatic.ca)