

First Sighting – Date: _____ Time: _____



Eastern Box Turtle (*Terrapene carolina carolina*)

Eastern box turtles are identified by their patterned, dome-shaped shells. Males have red or orange eyes, while females have brown or yellow eyes. These ancient creatures were roaming the land before dinosaurs appeared. Living up to 100 years, box turtles reach maturity between seven and ten years of age. Adult females lay 3-6 eggs in the spring that hatch in late summer or fall. Box turtles are fun, attractive, educational, and beneficial. They love to eat slugs and other garden pests. But, they need our help! Roads, fragmented habitat, lawn mowers and collecting for the pet trade are some of the biggest threats to this species.

What Eastern Box Turtles Need

Food: Insects, centipedes and other arthropods, snails and slugs, worms, fruits, vegetables, roots, and mushrooms are all part of the eastern box turtle menu.

Breeding: Females often lay their eggs in south-facing well-drained sunny soil. Young turtles need low substrate like leaf litter, ferns, and logs to hide in and under.

Shelter: Turtles are attracted to shrubby habitats with logs and woody debris. They hibernate in shallow wetlands, vernal pools, and even large puddles.

Other: Turtles can roam up to a mile in a year. Roads present a deadly hazard for these slow-moving creatures. Invasive exotics smother their food plants. Raccoons and crows, though native, are major predators of young turtles. Lawn mowers also injure and kill turtles.

Resources:

Native plants—DeBaggio Herbs, Nature By Design, Merrifield Garden Center and other local nurseries

Pond liners—local home improvement stores

Model Eastern Box Turtle Habitat:

Riverbend Park—www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/riverbend/

Runnymede Park—<http://www.frpweb.org/>

Hemlock Overlook Regional Park—www.nvrpa.org/parks/hemlockoverlook/

How You Can Help

- Plant natives to provide vegetable matter and arthropods as food for turtles. Include high or low bush blueberry, purple flowering raspberry and wild strawberry.
- Logs and other dead wood provide a foundation for mushrooms.
- Designate a few plants in your food garden for the turtles. A small wire fence will keep turtles from reaching the other plants.
- Plant a meadow patch. Consider Indian grass, little blue stem, switchgrass, goldenrod, New York and New England aster, swamp and common milkweed, and Joe-Pye weed.
- Let leaf litter build up under shrubs and trees.
- Plant ferns like cinnamon, Christmas, and royal ferns.
- The logs and woody debris that provide food will double as shelter.
- Build a brush shelter.
- Create a small wetland by putting in a shallow pond with aquatic plants like pickerelweed and arrow arum. Add land plants along the edge such as cardinal flower, blue vervain.
- Support connected natural areas.
- Fight roads that fragment parks and natural areas.
- Remove invasive exotic plants.
- Refrain from attracting raccoons and crows by keeping trash contained and pet food inside.
- Your meadow, wetland and brush shelter will reduce the area of lawn. Mow less often to further protect box turtles.

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