



## ***The Wood Turtle (Clemmys insculpta)***

Once again, our region reveals all of its richness. A case in point, the shores of the Sutton and Missisquoi rivers, where you can still observe one of our most terrestrial turtles, the Wood Turtle. Absent throughout most of Quebec, several populations still remain in the south of the province, in a dozen rivers in the Outaouais, the Mauricie, Montérégie and the Eastern Townships.

### **Characteristics**

The Wood Turtle can be distinguished by the orange colour of its paws and its neck. Its carapace is a brownish color with occasional grey, while its plastron is yellow with black spots. The plastron on the male is concave, unlike the female's, which is convex. The adult turtle's carapace is about 20 cm long.

### **Habitat**

The Wood Turtle has various habitats; generally, groves, open woods or fields. It also uses sites as agricultural land and gravel pits. However, it a watercourse, never more than a few hundred winding streams with beds of sand or fine gravel. As long as environmental conditions remain unchanged, it stays within a territory of approximately 20 hectares (about 50 acres) throughout its lifespan, which can be more than 20 years.



it can be found near alder groves altered by humans, such as never strays too far from meters. Rivers and are favored by this turtle. unchanged, it stays within a

### **Feeding**

Being a reptile, and therefore a cold-blooded animal, the Wood Turtle spends much of its days in springtime warming itself in the sun in order to regulate its body temperature. It is an omnivorous turtle which eats leaves, fruits, mushrooms, earthworms and other foods that it finds within its territory.

### **Reproduction**

Mating takes place in the water in springtime or in autumn, after the partners have completed their courting on dry land. In June, the female moves to her egg-laying site, which she returns to year after year. The egg-laying site consists of an extent of sand or fine gravel exposed to the sun and located close to water. It takes the female about two hours to dig out a shallow depression and to lay an average of 11 eggs there. These are then covered with sand, and the sun takes care of the incubation. These nests frequently suffer attacks by predators, such as raccoons and skunks, which considerably reduces the number of turtles that eventually see the light of day. On leaving the nest in autumn, the baby turtles head for the nearest waterway, where they will spend their first year. Only 1% of the baby turtles will reach adult age, which is about 13 years. When winter comes, the Wood Turtle hibernates at the bottom of the water until the end of April or early May.

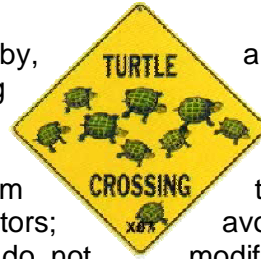


## A Threatened Species



The Quebec government has listed the Wood Turtle among the species likely to be designated as threatened or vulnerable. In the last few decades, Wood Turtle populations have declined dramatically. Agricultural and rural development have considerably modified its habitat, and the turtle's scarceness is directly linked to the loss of its preferred habitats. Roads and agricultural machinery also contribute to the high mortality of the Wood Turtle. In addition, it is subject to excessive removal from its habitat by people who want to keep it as a pet. Fortunately, it is now illegal to keep any turtle native to Canada in captivity.

### You can Help Protect the Wood Turtle



The Appalachian Corridor project (ACA) aims to protect this species by, among other things, sensitizing shoreline landowners to the importance of protecting the Wood Turtle's habitat and through research projects on the Sutton and Missisquoi rivers. A few simple actions on the part of landowners can also make a big difference. For example: fence off the banks in order to prevent livestock from trampling the nests; install grillwork over the nests to protect the eggs from predators; avoid forestry work during the turtle's active period (from March 31 to November 15); do not modify the banks by constructing walls of stone or concrete. For information on measures to take in order to protect the Wood Turtle's habitat, or to find out about conservation tools available to landowners for the protection of natural areas in perpetuity, please get in touch with your local conservation organization, or contact ACA at [info@apcor.ca](mailto:info@apcor.ca) or (450) 242-1125.

### Sources

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- Masse, D., and Nadeau, V. 2002. La population de tortue des bois suivie de près en Mauricie. Bulletin des espèces en péril N0-14. Parks Canada.
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- FAPAQ and MRN, 2002. Protection des espèces menacées ou vulnérables en milieu forestier: la tortue des bois (*Clemmys insculpta*). Société de la faune et des parcs du Québec, Direction du développement de la faune, Ministère des Ressources naturelles du Québec, Direction de l'environnement forestier.

#### French:

- [http://www.fapaq.gouv.qc.ca/fr/etu\\_rec/esp\\_mena\\_vuln/esp/tortue\\_bois.htm](http://www.fapaq.gouv.qc.ca/fr/etu_rec/esp_mena_vuln/esp/tortue_bois.htm)
- [http://www.csdeschenes.qc.ca/jeanraimbault/GarafWeb/Tortue\\_1/nouvelle\\_page\\_2.htm](http://www.csdeschenes.qc.ca/jeanraimbault/GarafWeb/Tortue_1/nouvelle_page_2.htm)
- [http://www.forum.umontreal.ca/numeros/2000\\_2001/forum\\_01\\_01\\_15/article11.html](http://www.forum.umontreal.ca/numeros/2000_2001/forum_01_01_15/article11.html)
- [http://www.fapaq.gouv.qc.ca/fr/c\\_press/region/mauricie/c010907maur.htm](http://www.fapaq.gouv.qc.ca/fr/c_press/region/mauricie/c010907maur.htm)
- <http://www.gnb.ca/0130/french/stories11.html>

#### English:

- [http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/accounts/clemmys/c.\\_insculpta\\$narrative.html](http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/accounts/clemmys/c._insculpta$narrative.html)
- <http://www.geocities.com/RainForest/Vines/8524/wood.html>

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*The Appalachian Corridor (ACA) is a conservation organization with a mission to implement, in collaboration with Nature Conservancy Quebec and local conservation organizations, a cross-border conservation strategy for the protection of a natural corridor extending from the Green Mountains of Vermont to Mount Orford, passing through the Sutton Mountains in the Eastern Townships. Mount Echo Conservation Association, Association pour la conservation de la nature de Stukely-Sud, Ruitter Valley Land Trust, Parc d'environnement naturel de Sutton, Mount Pinnacle Land Trust, Alderbrooke Marsh Land Trust, Memphremagog Wetlands foundation, Brome Lake Land Foundation, Société de conservation du corridor naturel de la rivière au Saumon, Conservation des vallons de la Serpentine, Société de protection foncière du lac Montjoie and Les Sentiers de l'Estrée are among the partners who support the global vision proposed by the ACA. Its activities are financed by, among others, by Environment Canada and private foundations. This information sheet was produced thanks to the financial contribution of MENV, Partnership program for private stewardship.*

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