



Ornate Box Turtle

Terrapene ornata ornata



Jewel

I was born July 15th, 1990 and came to the Racine Zoo in 1992 from the Department of Natural Resources.

I live with my friends Carl and Claude in the Discovery Center! I am known to my keepers as the independent one of the group, so I may be hard to find as my favorite thing to do is dig deep down into the mulch to bury myself. You may occasionally see me during education programs as an ambassador animal!

Claude

I was born July 15th, 1993 and came to the Racine Zoo in 2003.

I live with my friends Jewel and Carl in the Discovery Center! I am shy, but love to explore new enrichment my keepers give me. You can tell me apart from my friends because I only have one claw on my back right foot! You may occasionally see me during education programs as an ambassador animal!



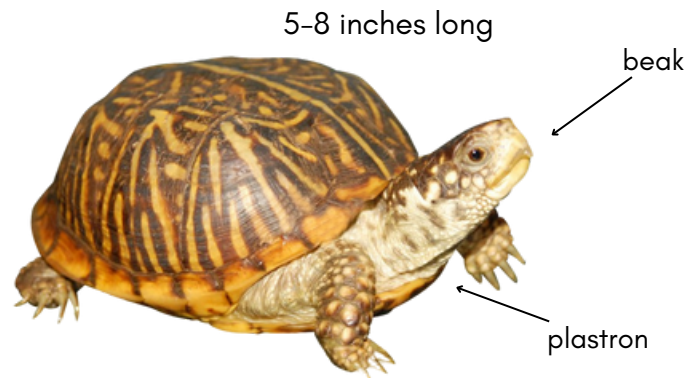
Carl

I was born June 15th, 2002 and came to the Racine Zoo in 2002.

I live with my friends Claude and Jewel in the Discovery Center! I am super curious and adventurous, you will often see me out and about in my habitat. I am also the smallest box turtle of the group! You may occasionally see me during education programs as an ambassador animal!

BOX TURTLES AT A GLANCE

- Turtles do not have teeth, instead they use their strong beak to tear food into pieces
- In the wild, ornate box turtles eat insects, plants, and fruit
- At the zoo, our box turtles eat insects, small mice, and mixed vegetables
- The lower shell (or *plastron*) is hinged, which allows them to close the entrance of their shells when threatened



Avg. life expectancy in native habitats: 30-40 years
Avg. life expectancy in human care: up to 100 years

WHERE ARE NATIVE ORNATE BOX TURTLE HABITATS LOCATED?



Ornate box turtles can inhabit a wide range throughout the central United States. This species of turtle is strictly terrestrial and prefers to spend their time in the grasslands and open woodlands. During the cold winter months, they will burrow deep enough to avoid freezing over winter, and then reappear in the early spring months.

Ornate Box Turtle Behaviors

SHEDDING

Turtles are reptiles and need to shed their skin to grow bigger! This shedding process also includes parts of their shells (that grow with them as they get bigger).

Shedding is a natural process that helps me grow big and strong!



BASKING

Reptiles are cold blooded, so in the wild they will often bask in a sunny spot to warm themselves up. At the zoo, our turtles have a heat lamp to mimic the warm sun.

We often like to sleep underneath our nice, warm lamps!



SLEEPING

Burrowing is a natural instinct for box turtles that provides them with shelter and a feeling of comfort. In order to survive the cold winter months, box turtles will dig down deep into the soil to avoid freezing.

Our long claws help us dig down deep into the mulch and soil.



RETRACTING

A box turtle fully retract their legs and head and close their shell. This is used as a defense mechanism when they are feeling threatened.

If I'm retracting my limbs and head into my shell and hiding, I am feeling stressed out!

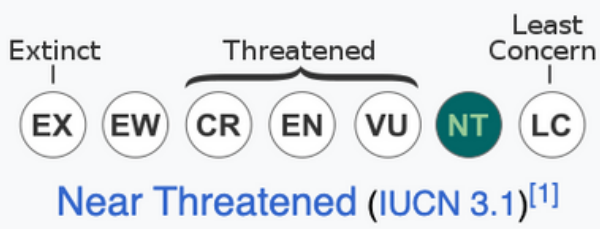


- As with many turtle species, the temperature at which the eggs incubate determines the sex of the hatchlings. More females are produced at higher incubation temperatures and more males are produced at lower temperatures.
- Box turtles do not provide parental care once the eggs are laid, therefore hatchling mortality is high.
- In the wild, ornate box turtles brumate, or hibernate, from late fall to early spring, ceasing many bodily functions while keeping warm in burrows underground called hibernaculums.
- You can determine the approximate age of turtles by counting the number of growth lines on the underside of the shell.

Ornate Box Turtle Conservation

The primary threats for ornate box turtles are road mortality and collection for the pet trade. This species has been heavily impacted by habitat loss in Wisconsin and are currently protected in our state.

Ornate Box Turtles are currently listed as **near threatened** due to a number of human-wildlife conflict issues. This species suffers greatly from habitat loss, road mortality, and removal from the wild for the pet trade.



How can we help?

Every year, these turtles must cross roads to get to their nesting sites. We can help by checking for turtles under our cars before driving away and driving carefully near wetland areas.

We can also help by never throwing food or food wrappers out our windows that may attract turtles or other wildlife to roads and result in possible collisions with wildlife.