



snapping turtle

Chelydra serpentina

| | |
|------------------|------------------------|
| Kingdom: | Animalia |
| Division/Phylum: | Chordata - vertebrates |
| Class: | Reptilia |
| Order: | Testudines |
| Family: | Chelydridae |

Features

The snapping turtle is a large turtle with a big head, a long tail, and a nasty disposition. Its most distinctive feature is its long tail with raised Stegosaurus-like plates projecting along the midline. It also has a much reduced diamond-shaped plastron (lower shell) that is connected to the carapace (upper shell) with two narrow bands on the sides. The rear marginal scales of the carapace have points that give the shell a jagged appearance. Adults are dark brown to nearly black on the back, but yellowish cream on the underside. The shells have no spots or other markings. Very young snappers may have a light brown spot on the edge of each marginal scale. The only other turtle that can be confused with the snapping turtle is the alligator snapping turtle, but it is larger and limited to the southeastern tip of Iowa in the Mississippi River. Adults usually have shells eight to 15 inches long and weigh up to 40 pounds.

Natural History

Snappers live in ponds, marshes, lakes, and rivers. They often are the first turtles to move into a newly constructed farm pond. They eat anything they can catch or scavenge including fish, dead animals, and even water birds and small mammals. They are used for human food throughout the inland United States.

Habitats

Mississippi River; Missouri River; interior rivers and streams, natural lakes and prairie marshes; constructed lakes, ponds, and reservoirs

Iowa Status

common, native

Iowa Range

statewide

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001.
Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats CD-ROM.