

Animal Information

Meet Our Education Animals at the Wilderness Station!

Red-eared slider

(Chrysemys scripta)



Range

Native in AZ, KS, OK, TX, LA, AK, MO, IO, IN, OH, TN, GA, MS, AL, WV.

Habitat

Sluggish rivers, shallow streams, swamps, ponds, and lakes with dense vegetation

Distinguishing Characteristics

Red-eared sliders can be identified by the broad reddish stripe behind its eye.

Behavior/Adaptations

These turtles love to bask in the sun. They can be seen stacking upon each other on a favorite log. Young sliders love eating water insects and tadpoles. Adults like to eat plants.

Status

Red-eared sliders were once the most popular turtle in the pet trade. During the 1960s, over 9000 adult sliders were taken from the wild. This seriously depleted natural populations in some areas. Today, it is illegal to own a wild animal as a pet. Unfortunately, these turtles are still bred in captivity and sold across the world as pets. **It is illegal to own a turtle in TN.** If you happen to come across a Red-eared slider in captivity, do not release them into the wild. Not only is it illegal, but it can cause serious damage to the existing native population. These wild turtles deserve our protection.

Northern Map turtle “Mapco”

(Graptemys geographic)



Range

Occurs in the Tennessee and Cumberland river drainages of middle and east Tennessee. It's range extends west through the Great Lakes south to Kansas and northwestern Georgia.

Habitat

Map turtles can be found in ponds, rivers, and lakes but prefer larger bodies of water with fallen logs and trees for basking.

Distinguish Characteristics

The upper shell (carapace) of the map turtle is olive green to brown with intricate yellow lines. Yellowish lines also occur on their head, neck, and limbs. These turtles have a distinct yellow dot right behind their eyes.

Behavior/Adaptations

Northern Map turtles are normally very shy and will quickly slip into the water from a basking log. In frozen lakes, they can be seen moving about under the ice.

Status

Abundant in Tennessee however they are vulnerable to human impact such as development and pollution. **It is illegal to own a turtle in TN.**

Spiny Soft shell "Perry"

(Apalone spinifera)



Range

The spiny soft shell turtle occurs from South Carolina, west to Texas and north up the Missouri River system to Montana and the Dakotas, then east to western New York.

Habitat

Mostly found in large rivers and streams, but also lakes, ponds, and marshes. Likes clear, sandy or muddy river bottoms.

Distinguishing Characteristics

The upper shell does not have any scales or plates and is leathery and soft. Distinct black or brown dots can be seen on the upper shell.

Status

Abundant across Tennessee however they are vulnerable to commercial harvesting, shoreline development, and chemical pollution. **It is illegal to own a turtle in TN.**

Eastern-box turtle "Jack"

(Terrapene carolina)



Range

Southern Maine south to the Florida keys and west to Michigan, south Illinois, Missouri, east Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas.

Habitat

Moist forested areas, but also wet meadows, pastures, and floodplains.

Distinguishing Characteristics

Box turtles have a highly domed carapace (upper shell) and a hinged plastron (lower shell). They are mainly terrestrial turtles.

Behavior/Adaptations

These turtles are usually seen early in the day or after it rains outside. They love to eat slugs, earthworms, and mushrooms. Sometimes these turtles can live for more than 100 years! If their habitat is not changed or destroyed, they can live in a space the size of a football field for their whole lives!

Status

Box turtles are a **species of concern** in Tennessee due to habitat fragmentation, mortality from cars, and collection for pets. The best way to protect Eastern box turtles is to leave them in the wild and help them across roads and hazards. **It is illegal to own a turtle in TN.**

Eastern screech-owl "Atticus"
(*Megascops asio*)



Range

Entire eastern United States including Texas, Kansas, Oklahoma, South and North Dakota, eastern parts of Montana, and southern Canada.

Habitat

These owls are found in a variety of habitats including: woodlots, forests, swamps, orchards, parks, and suburban gardens.

Distinguishing Characteristics

Screech owls are small and have yellow eyes with prominent ear tufts. There are two different color variations of Eastern screech owls, the reddish-brown or rufous morph and the gray morph.

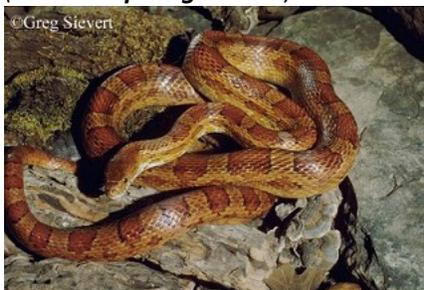
Behavior/Adaptations

Owls are active at night, hunting and catching prey to eat. The Eastern screech-owl eats a variety of small animals, but they especially love moths. They have a trilling song used by paired individuals in a family to keep in contact.

Status

Least concern. These animals are widespread and common.

Corn Snake "Charlie"
(*Pantherophis guttatus*)



Range

New Jersey south through Florida and s. Tennessee to Texas, Mexico, and se. Colorado.

Habitat

Found in a variety of habitats including fields, farms, rocky hillsides, suburban settings, and woodlots.

Distinguishing Characteristics

Corn snakes have red blotches outlined in black that occur down the middle of the back over a gray to orange background color. Considerable variation in pattern and color.

Behavior/Adaptations

These nocturnal snakes spend a lot of time crawling through rodent burrows looking for mice, moles, voles, and other small rodents to eat. They are constrictors, wrapping their prey around one or more coils of their body and squeezing.

Status

Least concern. Common, though not often encountered in the wild.

Mole Kingsnake “Pricilla”
(*Lampropeltis calligaster*)



Range

Found in the Mid-Atlantic States but absent from Florida, the Appalachian mountains, and the deep south.

Habitat

Kingsnakes have a diverse habitat. They can live in dry rocky hillsides, river swamps, coastal marshes, prairies, and deserts.

Distinguishing Characteristics

Mole king snakes have smooth scales and a light brown to reddish body. They have a row or reddish brown spots down the middle of their back that disappear as they age.

Behavior/Adaptations

Mole king snakes are primarily fossorial, spending much of their time underground. Like other king snakes, they eat a variety of prey including small mammals, birds, lizards, and other snakes.

Status

Least concern. The Mole king snake is fairly abundant although it is not often encountered in the wild.

Tiger salamander “Sadie”
(*Ambystoma tigrinum*)



Range

Widespread from central Alberta and Saskatchewan, south to Florida and Mexico, but absent from New England, Appalachian Mountains, Far West.

Habitat

Tiger salamanders have a varied habitat, from arid sagebrush plains, pine barrens, mountain forests, and damp meadows where ground is easily burrowed.

Distinguishing Characteristics

The Tiger salamander is North America’s largest land-dwelling salamander. They are very stout with a broad head and small eyes.

Behavior/Adaptations

Salamanders are often seen at night after heavy rains, especially during breeding season. They live beneath logs and debris normally near water. They love to eat earthworms, large insects, small mice, and amphibians.

Status

Tiger salamanders are listed as endangered in Delaware, New York, New Jersey, and Maryland; protected in Arizona; and of special concern in both North and South Carolina. Populations of Tiger salamanders in Tennessee are on the decline due to deforestation.

Eastern Hognose Snake “Spike”

(Heterodon platirhinos)



Range

Found in the Eastern half of the United States from southern Florida north to central New England, the Great Lake Region, and southern Canada.

Habitat

Prefers areas where they can burrow with sandy or loose burrow but they can be found in a variety of habitats. They can be found around farms, old fields, or rocky hillsides.

Distinguishing Characteristics

These snakes are stout and medium sized with variable coloration patterns. All are easily distinguished by an upturned snout like a hog’s nose.

Behavior/Adaptations

Hognose snakes have several elaborate defense mechanisms including rolling over to play dead, regurgitating and defecating, and releasing a musky odor.

Status

Common across Tennessee however they are vulnerable to being killed because of their dramatic behavior which is sometimes mistaken for that of a venomous snake.

Virginia Opossum “Festus”

(Didelphis virginiana)



Range

Found north of Mexico throughout the eastern portion of the United States, including all of Tennessee, extending into New England.

Habitat

Open forests with a permanent water source. They can also be found on farms, in subdivisions, and in urban areas along roadways. Virginia opossums seldom remain in a single area for more than a few days.

Distinguishing Characteristics

Virginia opossums have a white face with a pointed snout and pink nose. They have black hairless ears and a prehensile tail.

Behavior/Adaptations

When escape from a predator is impossible, Virginia opossums can sometimes feign death by entering a catatonic state. They use their prehensile tails to gather nesting materials.

Status

Least concern. Virginia opossums are common statewide.