

THE AMERICAN BIOLOGY TEACHER



About Our Cover

The Eastern Box Turtle (*Terrapene carolina carolina*) is found on the moist forest floors of deciduous forests throughout the eastern and southeastern United States. Their typical home range is one to two hectares in size. They usually travel <150 feet a day but they have been known to travel more than a mile when radio-tagged (not necessarily in one day!). Typical foods include both plant and animal materials, usually preferring foods compatible with their size. Common foods include berries, seeds, buds, worms, beetles, snails, and of course, slugs (who are both food sources and hitchhikers!). They have been observed, however, eating bird chicks from nests.

It is relatively easy to distinguish male from female box turtles without disturbing them as the males typically have reddish irises, while those of the females are usually brown, sometimes yellow. The failsafe way to determine sex is to examine the plastron, which is the underside of the turtle's shell. The female plastron is relatively flat, and that of the male is concave. This concave shape enables the male to more easily mount the female during mating. A female does not have to mate each year to produce offspring. She is capable of storing sperm in her oviducts for up to four years and still produce viable offspring.

The photo was taken by Bob Ford in Scotts Run Nature Preserve in Fairfax County, Virginia, on a foggy morning after a light rain. The image was taken with a Nikon D750 camera mounted on a Velbon tripod with a 60 mm Micro Nikkor lens. Bob Ford is a Professor in the Environmental Biology Department at Frederick Community College.

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