



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

Once again, our region reveals all of its richness and diversity as illustrated, for instance, with the shores of the Sutton, Missisquoi and Missisquoi Nord rivers, where you can still observe one of our most terrestrial turtles, the Wood Turtle. Absent from most of Quebec, several populations still remain in the south of the province in a dozen rivers of the Outaouais, Mauricie, Montérégie and Eastern Townships.

### **Characteristics**

The Wood Turtle can be readily identified by the orange colour of its legs and its neck. Its sculpted carapace is a brownish color with occasional grey, while its plastron is yellow with black spots. The male's plastron (underside of the carapace) is concave while the female's is convex. An adult turtle's carapace can grow up to 9 inches long (about 24 cm).

### **Habitat**

The Wood Turtle uses a variety of habitats; generally, it can be found near alder groves, open woods or fields. It can also use sites altered by humans, such as agricultural land and gravel pits. However, it never strays too far from a watercourse – never more than a few hundred metres. Rivers and winding streams with beds of sand or fine gravel are favoured by this turtle. 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.



### **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 has an omnivorous diet, eating leaves, fruits, mushrooms, earthworms and a variety of other foods that it finds within its territory.

### **Reproduction**

Mating takes place in the water in the springtime or autumn, once the partners have completed their courting on dry land. In June, the female moves to her usual egg-laying site, which she returns to year after year. The egg-laying site consists of an area 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. These are then covered with sand, and the sun takes care of the incubation process. 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, baby turtles head for the nearest waterway, where they will spend their first year. Only 1% of hatched 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 Wood Turtle has been designated as “Vulnerable” by the Government of Quebec and is also listed as a “Threatened” species in Canada. In the last few decades, Wood Turtle populations have declined dramatically. Agricultural and rural development led to considerable modifications of its natural habitats, 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

Appalachian Corridor aims to protect this species by, among other things, raising awareness about their plight and the importance of protecting their habitats, aiming to inform shoreline landowners in particular. Several research projects have also taken place on the Sutton and Missisquoi rivers. A few simple actions on the part of landowners can also make a big difference. For instance, fencing off the banks in order to prevent livestock from trampling the nests; raising the height of hay-mowers to at least 4 inches (10 cm) off the ground in a 200-meter area along rivers where the Wood Turtle occurs; installing grillwork over the nests to protect the eggs from predators; avoiding forestry work during the turtle’s active period (from March 31 to November 15); avoiding any modification of the riverbanks 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 group, or contact Appalachian Corridor at [info@corridorappalachien.ca](mailto:info@corridorappalachien.ca) or (450) 297-1145.

## Sources

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### French:

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### English:

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<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. Partners supporting the global vision proposed by Appalachian Corridor include: 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, Les Sentiers de l’Estrie, Conservation Espace Nature Sjefford and Massawippi Conservation Trust. This factsheet was produced with financial contribution from Quebec’s ministère de l’Environnement, as part of their Partenaire pour la conservation volontaire Program.*

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