

**PLEASE: DON'T TAKE AN
ALLIGATOR SNAPPING
TURTLE!**

ALLIGATOR SNAPPING TURTLES ARE
A STATE ENDANGERED SPECIES AND
PROTECTED BY LAW.

The State of Illinois is reintroducing
the native Alligator Snapping Turtle to
strategic watersheds in Illinois. You can help
recover this unique reptile by:

- Learning the difference between common snapping turtles and alligator snappers.
- Reporting observations of alligator snapping turtles.
- Protecting river corridors and associated wetland habitat.
- Reporting any illegal capture, take, or possession of Alligator Snapping Turtles.

Thank You for Your Cooperation!

Please report Alligator Snapping Turtle sightings and/or incidental captures to:
Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Endangered Species Program
One Natural Resources Way
Springfield, IL. 62702-1271
Phone: (217)782-6384; Fax: (217)785-2438
E-mail: endspec@dnrmil.state.il.us

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Equal opportunity to participate in programs of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and those funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other agencies is available to all individuals regardless of race, color, sex, national origin, disability, age, religion, or other non-merit factors. If you believe you have been discriminated against, contact the funding source's civil rights office and/or the Equal Employment Opportunity Officer, IDNR, One Natural Resources Way, Springfield, IL. 62702-1271; 217/785-0067; TTY 217/782-9175.

This information may be provided in an alternative format if required. Contact the IDNR Clearinghouse at: 217/782-7498 for assistance.

*Printed by Authority of the State of Illinois  
12/2005-1*

Illinois Department of Natural Resources  
Office of Resource Conservation  
One Natural Resources Way  
Springfield, IL. 62702-1271



## Recovery of the Alligator Snapping Turtle in Illinois

*Restoring a rare and valuable  
aquatic resource*



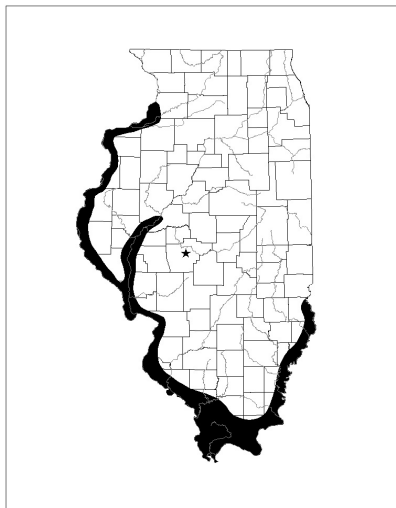
## ALLIGATOR SNAPPING TURTLE

(*Macrochelys temminckii*)

The alligator snapping turtle is an aquatic turtle with a sharp, hooked beak. This turtle spends most of its time in deep water. Its habitat includes sloughs and deep, muddy pools of large rivers. Water pollution, habitat alteration, a reduction in egg-laying sites, predation of eggs by raccoons, and over-harvesting have probably all had a part in causing the massive decline of this species. The species is listed as **ENDANGERED** by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

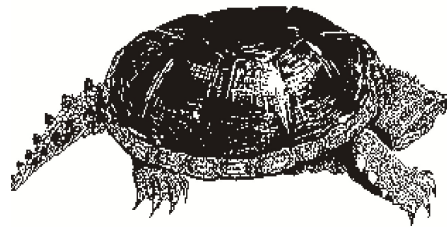
### Habitat and Distribution

By the 1960s, the alligator snapping turtle was considered extremely rare in Illinois, occurring in 12 counties in the Mississippi, lower Illinois, Ohio, and Wabash Rivers and their associated tributaries. The most recent Illinois record for this species is from Union County in 1984. Overall, this turtle is confined to the Gulf of Mexico drainages of the United States and is somewhat widespread in the lower Mississippi valley. The shaded area below represents the historic distribution of this animal in Illinois.



### Species Identification

The alligator snapping turtle is the largest freshwater turtle species in the world and can be identified by the three prominent ridges on the upper shell (carapace). The tail is long and muscular. Numerous fleshy projections can be found on the skin of the head, neck, and front legs. The head is also much larger, in proportion to body size, than that of the common snapping turtle. An adult snapping turtle's weight may range from 35 to 105 pounds.



Common Snapping Turtle

### Life History

This species is unique in being able to use its tongue as a lure to entice fish into its mouth. The alligator snapping turtle feeds mainly on non-game (rough) fish, but will also capture and eat small turtles. Alligator snapping turtles are sexually mature between 11 and 13 years of age. Courtship probably begins in late spring. Females lay 16 to 56 eggs during May and June. Females may produce eggs only every other year.

The alligator snapping turtle seldom comes out of the water to bask in the sun. Females will leave the water to find an egg-laying site. Most of their time is spent in deep water in mud and hiding among root snags. They are active at night. Their method of moving is by walking rather than swimming.

### Cause of Historic Decline

Some hatchlings of alligator snapping turtles were collected for the pet trade. Larger specimens were exploited for meat in local areas. Over-harvesting and illegal collection has eliminated most populations. The large shells were often used for exhibit purposes.

### Current Threats to Alligator Snapping Turtles

**Habitat loss:** Alterations in major rivers has created barriers to turtles migrating to suitable breeding habitat. Removal of log jams in rivers destroys the hiding and hunting areas used by snapping turtles.

**Illegal Harvest:** Harvest of alligator snapping turtles is **ILLEGAL** in Illinois. Unbaited, unmarked, and abandoned setlines and trotlines pose a threat to all species of aquatic turtles including alligator snapping turtles. Turtles can take the bait on trotlines. They also get hooked on the limbs, neck, or edge of the shell on abandoned trotlines and drown.

### Reintroduction: A Step Towards Recovery

The State of Illinois is reintroducing the native Alligator Snapping Turtle to strategic watersheds in an effort to restore this unique and majestic reptile. Turtles play an important role as a part of the check-and-balance system in our lakes and rivers. Please help us bring back this rare animal for future generations to enjoy.

