

alligator snapping turtle

Macrochelys temminckii

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Reptilia
Order: Testudines
Family: Chelydridae

ILLINOIS STATUS

endangered, native

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FEATURES

An average-sized alligator snapping turtle is 15 to 26 inches long and weighs 35 to 150 pounds. It has three rows of scutes (ridges) on the carapace (top of the shell). Its head is very large and has a hooked beak. A long tail is another feature. This turtle cannot withdraw completely into its shell.

BEHAVIORS

This turtle is found in permanent water bodies. The alligator snapping turtle sits on the bottom of a body of water with its mouth open waiting on prey to come near. The mouth has a pink "lure" that may be wiggled to attract fish. It is active at night. It rarely swims, preferring to walk on the bottom. Alligator snapping turtles do not become mature until they are at least 11 years old. Mating may occur at any time of the year when the turtles are active but is most likely in late spring. The female deposits eggs in a nest in soil in late spring or early summer. The number of eggs laid depends on the size of the female, with over 50 eggs possible. Hatching occurs in late summer. This turtle primarily eats fishes but will take other species that come too close to its powerful jaws.

ILLINOIS RANGE



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adults



young hatching from egg



“decoy” tongue showing



Aquatic Habitats

rivers and streams; swamps; lakes, ponds and reservoirs

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none