

ornate box turtle *Terrapene ornate*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Testudines

Family: Emydidae

ILLINOIS STATUS threatened, native

FEATURES

The ornate box turtle averages four to five inches in length. It has a high, domelike carapace (upper shell). The hinged plastron (lower shell) allows the animal to completely enclose itself in the shell. The shell is dark with markings on the carapace and plastron. Light lines radiate downward on each side of the carapace.

BEHAVIORS

The ornate box turtle lives in sand prairies in the northern part of Illinois and prairies in the southern part of the state. It is terrestrial. This reptile feeds early in the morning and again late in the day. It burrows in the ground to escape heat in summer and cold and lack of food in winter. It may also find shelter in grasses or in the burrows of other animals. This turtle may live for 30 years. Mating may occur in the spring or fall. The female deposits four to six eggs in a nest in soil during June or July, often at the edge of a woodland. She may lay more than one clutch per year. Hatching occurs by September. The ornate box turtle eats insects, snails, earthworms, tadpoles, dead animals, bird eggs and berries and other plant materials.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

none

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

black soil prairie; hill prairie; sand prairie

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