



Updates from the Trail: June 2023

Species spotlight: Eastern Box Turtle (*Terrapene carolina*)

June brought about many sightings of Eastern Box Turtles, so we thought we would make them our Species spotlight.

The Eastern Box Turtle is a species of special concern here in Massachusetts due to habitat loss and fragmentation. These terrestrial turtles spend their entire lives in woodland areas, staying in the same approximate square mile. They brumate or hibernate during the winter, creating small burrows under leaf litter and soil. Some box turtles are known to hibernate in the same place yearly. Once the temperature rises in spring, they awaken from their winter slumber to eat and mate. Female turtles lay clutches of between two and eight eggs, and the incubation period is about three months. Once the hatchlings emerge from their shells, they are on their own and spend most of their time eating. Juvenile box turtles need more protein than adults so they may consume more slugs, worms, or other bugs.



The brightly patterned carapace of the Eastern Box Turtle. Photo credit: Lissy Perna.

Brightly patterned carapaces or shells are the trademarks of box turtles; yellow, orange, and sometimes red markings cover their dark shells. The box turtle can uniquely enclose itself completely within these shells. A hinge on the plastron or underside of the shell allows them to withdraw their head and appendages and keep them safe from predators or threats.



Gently carrying a box turtle across the road. Notice this turtle is completely enclosed within its shell. Photo credit Lissy Perna.

Last year, Brewster Conservation Trust offered to be a conduit for reporting box turtle sightings throughout the town to the Massachusetts Fish & Wildlife Endangered Species Program. We collected and reported nearly two dozen individual turtle sightings and were able to spread the word on the importance of protecting this species. For more information on how you can report your sightings visit our website [HERE](#).

There are several reasons why the Eastern Box Turtle is under threat. One of them being road mortality. If you happen to see a box turtle in a roadway, you can help it by carefully carrying it to the side of the road in the same direction it was heading. Holding it firmly on both sides of the shell is the best practice. Turtles usually do not need human intervention, but if you see one that looks injured or in distress, Wild Care Cape Cod in Eastham (508-240-2255) has plenty of experience evaluating and rehabilitating these reptiles.

Learn more about the Eastern Box Turtle with [THIS](#) fact sheet from the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program.