

# Eastern Box Turtles and the Department of Defense

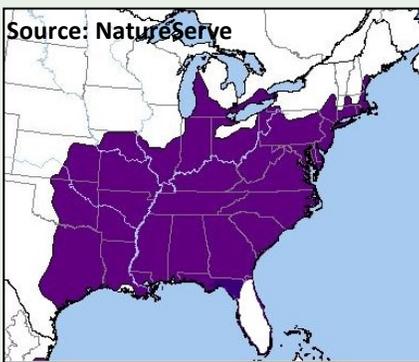


Picture by: Paul Block

The Eastern Box Turtle (*Terrapene carolina*) is the most common terrestrial turtle on military lands. This is a long-lived species, with individuals often surviving 30-50 years of age, and sometimes even over 100 years. It was named for its ability to completely “box up” inside its shell as an adult when it feels threatened.

**Description:** Adults are typically 4.5 to 6.5 inches (11.5-15.2 cm) in length. The upper shell (carapace) is dome-shaped and is highly variable in color and pattern. Its carapace typically has a brownish background color mottled with yellow or orange splotches. Males have a concave plastron (lower shell) and often have red eyes. Females have a flat plastron and normally yellow or brown eyes.

**Range:** The Eastern Box Turtle is found mainly in the eastern United States. They occur as far north as southern Maine and parts of the Michigan, south to northern Florida and west to Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas.



Source: NatureServe

**Habitat:** Habitat preferences include open, mixed, and deciduous forest with a moist and well-drained forest floor. They are often found in fields and wetland edges, occasionally soaking in water, especially during hot, dry periods.

**Behavior:** Eastern Box Turtles become sexually mature between 7–10 years of age. Courtship and mating may occur at various times throughout the warmer months. The egg-laying period occurs mostly from May to July. Box Turtles are omnivores, feeding on a variety of plants, invertebrates, carrion and fungi. They are active mostly during the day and annual adult home ranges vary in size from approximately 2-27 acres. They hibernate in the winter by burrowing into soft soil, or sheltering beneath forest floor debris such as logs, dense leaf litter, or in stump holes. They can successfully hibernate in sites that may experience subfreezing temperatures, provided they are able to bury themselves below the frost line.

**Military Interactions:** The Eastern Box Turtle is the most common terrestrial turtle on military lands. Road mortality can sometimes be an issue on military sites. For information on assisting turtles safely crossing roads, see the [Turtles and Roads](#) flier.

**Conservation Status:** The Eastern Box Turtle is not federally listed under the Endangered Species Act. NatureServe lists this species as G5 –Secure, and the IUCN ranks the species as Vulnerable. Its populations are considered to be decreasing. It is state-endangered in Maine. Lastly, this species have been given protections by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) under Appendix II.

**Threats/Planning Considerations:** Threats to this species includes habitat loss, alteration and fragmentation, vehicle strikes, pesticide usage, collection as a food source and for the pet trade, and agricultural burning. An overabundance of natural predators, such as skunks and raccoons, can have devastating impacts on nests and hatchlings. It is recommended that military natural resource managers maintain forested and field habitats for this species and consider how land management activities, such as prescribed burning, can impact this species.

## Occurrence on Military Lands

Confirmed	Potential
Confirmed present on 133 military sites (26 Air Force; 61 Army; 9 Marine Corps; and 37 Navy).	Up to an additional 62 military sites (15 Air Force; 19 Army; 1 Marine Corps; and 27 Navy)

