Turtles spend most of their lives in water. They are adapted for aquatic life, with webbed feet or flippers. Tortoises are land animals. Their feet are round and stumpy and adapted for walking on land.

There are no native tortoises in Indiana, though the Eastern Box Turtle is commonly confused as one due to their similar terrestrial habits and overall appearance. This species of turtle is of special concern in Indiana. This is due to the fact that they are slow growing, with few offspring, and have a high mortality rate of being hit on roads.

It is illegal to collect Eastern box turtles from the wild. They generally do not make good pets because they get easily stressed with overhandling and require more specialized care than other turtle species.

Turtles gender is determined by the temperature of their egg before they hatch. If a turtle’s eggs incubate below 81.86 Fahrenheit, the turtle hatchlings will be male. If the eggs incubate above 87.8 Fahrenheit, the hatchlings will be female. Turtles bury their eggs underground to incubate. Within one nest of eggs, the temperature can shift enough to hatch both males and females depending on the depth where each individual egg rests.
Snapping Turtles

- Snapping turtles roamed the earth before dinosaurs (90 million years!)
- The largest snapping turtle caught in the wild was 68 pounds
- They can live to be 75+ years old
- The common snapping turtle is considered a game species and regulated by hunting and fishing laws in Indiana.
- They can be found in both moving water (rivers and streams) and still water (ponds and lakes)
- Although they have fierce dispositions, when in water, snapping turtles will swim quietly away from any disturbance or hide beneath mud/grass long before they will attack
- A wild snapping turtle will make a hissing sound when it is threatened or encountered, but they prefer not to invoke confrontations.
- Snappers can stretch their necks back across their own carapace (top of the shell) and to their hind feet on either side to bite
- When they feel stressed they release a musky odor from behind their legs
- Alligator snapping turtles (a non-closely related species not commonly found in Indiana) is the species most credited for biting off fingers and other human-turtle aggressions.

It may be tempting to rescue a snapping turtle found on a road by getting it to bite a stick and then dragging it out of immediate danger. This action can, however, severely scrape the legs and underside of the turtle and lead to deadly infections in the wounds. The safest way to pick up a common snapping turtle is by grasping the carapace above the back legs. There is a large gap above the back legs that allows for easy grasping of the carapace and keeps hands safe from both the beak and claws of the turtle. It can also be picked up with a shovel, from the back, making sure the shovel is square across the bottom of the shell. The easiest way, though, is with a blanket or tarp, picking up the corners with the turtle in the middle. It is a common misconception that snapping turtles may be safely picked up by the tail with no harm to the animal— there is a high chance of injuring the turtle, especially the tail itself and the vertebral column.
Painted Turtles — Determining How Old They Are

Like a tree, you can count the rings on a pointed turtle to see its age. The shell of a painted turtle is made up of 13 bone plates, or scutes. When the turtle grows, it sheds the outside layer of its scutes and grows new plates underneath. If you count the rings on the scutes, you can know the age of the turtle. This method can be difficult and isn’t always exact. This is because like trees, turtles are living and dynamic creatures. Also like with trees, these rings appear in times when the turtles are eating plenty and when food is scarce. This usually corresponds with summer and winter which would make for a good year count. It can however happen at any time when food is hard to find.

Let’s take the shell of the painted turtle from the video:

![Shell of a painted turtle with two rings]

You can see here that there are two rings inside the shape of the scute.

This can give us an idea that the turtle is around 2 years old.

But remember that this is only an estimate. Let’s take a look at the belly of the turtle.

![Belly of a painted turtle with rings]

Here there are also rings that can help us estimate how old the turtle is.

The inside ring on the belly of the turtle represents when the turtle was born (zero years) and the second ring would be one year.

This helps us estimate that the turtle is between one and two years old.

Painted turtles are the most common and widely spread turtles in North America. They can be found from southern Canada to northern Mexico and across the whole United States. They are often kept as pets.