

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Snapping turtles

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

Dottie Brown was in corporate sales for years before she found her calling in wildlife. Now she's an environmental science student at UNCA, spending as much time as possible tracking imperiled wildlife with state biologists. Dottie is quick to stick her hand in the muck searching for rare bog turtles. One of the perils of searching for bog turtles is finding a bog turtle predator – the snapping turtle. Dottie's encounter with a snapper cost her a fingernail and gave her a severely bruised finger. And she considers herself lucky.

Though snappers prefer lakes, ponds, and slow rivers, they're often seen on land, migrating between water bodies. Its aggressive reputation mainly comes from encounters on land, where it defensively snaps and bites when bothered. In aquatic habitats, it tends to be more docile, preferring retreat or withdrawal to confrontation.

Despite their capacity for aggressiveness, plants make up most of their diet, though they'll eat nearly anything too slow to escape its jaws, including birds, fish, other turtles and small mammals. Humans are an adult snapping turtle's main predator, hunting them for meat for turtle soup. A handful of snapping turtle species and sub-species are found from Canada to Ecuador, with the common snapping turtle found across much of eastern North America, including the Southern Appalachians, where it's our largest turtle, averaging 8 to 14 inches long and weighing 10 to 35 pounds.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peebles.