

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Box turtle threats

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

My daily commute usually takes me by a small patch of forest owned by the University of North Carolina at Asheville. Going home one recent afternoon, I went around a sharp curve and came upon a bump in the road. A bump that was slowly moving.

Fortunately, I could stop well before I hit the box turtle. Roads are especially perilous to box turtles, who often find their territory bisected by them. Box turtles cross roads for a reason, and when you find one in the road, the best you can do is move it to the side it was headed toward. Like all animals, it's a bad idea to carry it to a distant location which could be far removed from a mate or established home territory, or you may contribute to the spread of disease.

Box turtles are slow to sexual maturity, not becoming mature until between seven and ten years old; and they have few offspring – three to six eggs a year which are left in a shallow, unguarded nest. These traits make it hard for box turtle populations to rebound, making another danger ever worse – collection for the pet trade. If you're looking for a reptile pet, it's best to go with a captive-bred animal instead of one born in the wild.

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