herpy

TORTOISES AND TURTLES

Common Snapping Turtle

Chelydra serpentina

Chelydra serpentina is a large, almost entirely aquatic turtle from eastern North America with powerful jaws and a long tail. The shell is typically 25-45 cm, the animal weighs 5-16 kg, and it can live for many decades. The species requires a very large, filtered tank with a bare bottom, is not suited to handling and easily becomes overweight.

Family: Chelydridae Published 16 November 2026

KEY FACTS

THE ANIMAL

Adult size	**25-45 cm** total length incl. tail
Weight	**4,500-16,000 g**
Lifespan	**30-50 years**
Active	**By day and at night**
Lifestyle	**Aquatic**
Habitat	**Wetland and temperate woodland and meadow**
Difficulty	**Experienced**

CARE

Min. enclosure	**200 × 100 × 70 cm** L × W × H for 1 adult
Temperature, day	**24-28 °C**
Basking spot	**29-32 °C**
Temperature, night	**20-24 °C**
Humidity	**50-80%**
Water	**Aquaterrarium** depth 25-40 cm
Water temperature	**23-27 °C**
UVB	**Recommended** Ferguson zone 2
Winter rest	**4-6 °C** 8-12 weeks
Diet	**Insects, complete diet, plants, vertebrates and worms/snails**
Kept	**Singly**

BREEDING

Reproduction	**Egg-laying**
Sexually mature	**84-240 months**
Clutch size	**25-80 eggs**
Clutches per year	**1**
Incubation	**63-140 days** at 20-30 °C

PROTECTION AND PAPERWORK

CITES	**Appendix II**
EU annex	**Annex B**
IUCN	**Least Concern (LC)**

Care at a glance

THE ENCLOSURE	Keep the animal in a large tank, a plastic stock tank or a pond, not in an ordinary enclosure.
TEMPERATURE	The water should be 23-27 °C. Below about 21 °C the animal loses its appetite and digests poorly, and above about 29 °C it becomes stressed and more aggressive, and the bacteria in the water multiply faster.
HUMIDITY AND WATER	The turtle's humidity is the water itself, so the relative humidity of the air is not decisive and not documented in detail for the species; 50-80 % in the room is ample. What is decisive is the cleanliness of the water.
WATER AND WATER QUALITY	The water is the animal's living space, so it must be deep enough, clean and warm. Adults do well in 25-40 cm of water. The temperature is 23-27 °C.
LIGHTING AND UVB	UVB is recommended, but less essential than for aquatic turtles that bask a great deal, because the animal gets D3 through whole prey.
FEEDING	*C. serpentina* is omnivorous and in the wild eats small animals, fish, frogs, amphibians, crustaceans, snails, worms, reptiles, carrion and large amounts of aquatic plants.
BEHAVIOUR AND HANDLING	*C. serpentina* is defensive and bites quickly and hard when picked up or when it feels threatened; a bite can cause deep wounds. The neck is long and mobile, so the animal can reach back over the shell.
NATIVE RANGE	United States and Canada.

The full guide with map and updates: herpy.org/skildpadder/chelydra-serpentina