Box Turtles

Don't take me to your home — leave me in mine!

Box turtles can be found statewide in Louisiana. They are handsome and charismatic. Combined with their relatively small size, the temptation to take a wild box turtle home for a pet is understandable. Here are some reasons why that is not a good idea.

1. Box turtle populations across the eastern United States have been dwindling for years. Their populations cannot sustain high levels of harvest on top of other stressors, such as habitat loss and road mortality. In the late 1990s, about 30,000 wild Louisiana box turtles were removed from the wild in a period of 41 months destined for the pet trade. In response to these high harvest numbers, Louisiana passed a law ceasing all commercial harvest of box turtles in the state. Remember, once you remove a box turtle from the wild, it is dead ecologically speaking, and can no longer help maintain or grow populations. It would be a shame if future generations could no longer enjoy the sight of a wild box turtle.

2. Box turtles have very strong affinities for the small home range where they hatched and live. In these areas, they know precisely where to find food, mates and good places to lay eggs or spend the winter. When a box turtle is removed from its home, it causes stress, which often leads to health issues and a shorter life span.

3. Box turtles are very long-lived. They can certainly live 50 years and there are records of them living over 100 years. This is not the kind of commitment to care most people understand when they remove a box turtle from the wild. Unfortunately, many box turtles removed from the wild do not live to these old ages, as it is hard to replicate all the requirements for proper care in captivity.

Saving a Box Turtle on the Road

Roads have bisected many habitats that box turtles and other animals call home. As such, box turtles are often killed while slowly crossing roads.

Attentive driving will allow you to spot a crossing box turtle in enough time to take appropriate action. If safe to do so, you can move a box turtle off the road in the direction it was headed. Do not release it elsewhere. The area where it is crossings is its home.

Photo by Anna Kathryn Ellery

Box turtles as pets in Louisiana

With a Louisiana fishing license, you can legally take two box turtles from the wild per day and have in your possession up to four wild box turtles. However, just because it is legal does not mean it is the wise choice. Please leave wild box turtles in their home so that future generations of kids and adults alike can enjoy them.

If you must get a pet box turtle, there are captive bred animals available that would be a better choice than removal of box turtles from the wild.

Never release a pet box turtle, whether captive bred or wild caught, back into the wild. Besides a likely early death for that particular animal, diseases picked up in captivity may be spread to the wild population in that area. Also, if the turtle survives to reproduce and is not from that area, it can alter the genetics of that population.