



## KANSAS LEGEND BIOGRAPHY

### Ornate Box Turtle

The ornate box turtle became Kansas's state reptile on April 14, 1986 after being nominated by a sixth grade class from Caldwell. Governor John Carlin signed the bill authorizing the decision as part of the 125<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration of Kansas' statehood. The ornate box turtle joined a host of symbols that represent Kansas and its unique features.

The ornate box turtle, or *Terrapene ornata*, can be found throughout the state of Kansas, as they have an ability to adapt to a variety of environments. The species is a dryland turtle and can often be found in backwoods, fields and backyards. The ornate box turtle can be identified by the yellow stripes found on both the upper and lower shell. Females traditionally have yellow-brown eyes, while males have red eyes.

Ornate box turtles are omnivorous, focusing on carnivorous pursuits when younger and often turning into more herbivorous creatures with age. These reptiles feed on crickets, worms, caterpillars, various insects and even small mice, as well as fruits, flowers and mushrooms. Regular access to a water sources is also necessary for the survival of this turtle.

For the ornate box turtle, mating season begins in the spring and continues through the summer into October. Some males mate with the same female for multiple years, and others mate with different females over time. A female can produce offspring for up to four years after copulating successfully one time. Female box turtles bury their eggs in sandy or moist soil and cover the nest. Typically, females lay four or five eggs at a time, which take approximately three months to hatch.

One distinctive attribute of the box turtle is its ability to close its shell almost completely. The upper shell, or carapace, connects to the hinged lower shell, or plastron, allowing the turtle to retract its head, limbs and tail completely into the shell for protection. This is very necessary for the turtle's survival because it has no teeth, only the sharp edges of its jaw used to cut its food. The safety mechanism of the shell makes it very difficult for other animals to prey on the turtle. The shell also has miraculous regenerative abilities if the turtle sustains injury.

Ornate box turtles typically live 30 to 50 years but have been known to live up to 100 years. The ornate box turtle is closely related to five other species of box turtles, of which three can be found in other areas of the United States and two in Mexico. The three-toed box turtle and the eastern box turtle can also be found in Kansas.

