

Feral February Episode 4 – The jaws that bite

Description

Throughout the month of February, which I am calling –œFeral February,–œ I am going to do something a little bit different –œ I –œ™m going to create a series of theme posts every week day about my favourite things in the world: Animals.

Today –œ™s animal is the alligator snapping turtle!

The alligator snapping turtle is the heaviest freshwater turtle that exists today, with the average male clocking in at 175 pounds and being the size of a large serving plate (the females weigh around 50 pounds and are significantly smaller). However, since they continue to grow throughout their lives, some males have weighed over 220 pounds!

Alligator snapping turtles are clearly identified by their large heads and the three rows of protruding spiked scales on their shells. They are found in the southwestern United States, but due to habitat loss, being hunted for their meat and being used for the exotic animal trade, their numbers have been decreasing, so they –œ™re listed as a threatened species.



Alligator snapping turtle. Photo courtesy of Gary M. Stolz/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
[Source.](#)

These animals, like [the Gaboon viper](#) featured in a previous post, alligator snapping turtles are ambush predators, but they also scavenge at night. Unlike the Gaboon viper, instead of sitting and waiting for a prey item to come by chance, this animal opens its jaws and wriggles a small, pink, wormlike structure on the floor of its mouth to attract fish. Once fish or other prey approach the –œœlure,–œ the alligator

snapping turtle (like its namesake) delivers a powerful bite – powerful enough to sever a broom handle or a human finger.

Daily dose of trivia:

I once had a run-in with an alligator snapping turtle when I was the “nature guy” at an overnight camp. I got called that someone saw a snapping turtle under the swimming dock, so I went with a friend and captured it. If you ever need to pick up an alligator snapping turtle, practice extreme caution, as their bite is extremely dangerous. To hold them safely, you grab the shell – both behind its head and at the back by its tail – so it cannot bite you because of its large head. After a few days in my care, where he ate copious amounts of fish, I relocated him to a nice river away from the camp.

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