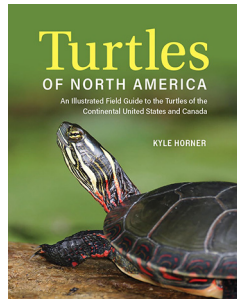


## HERPETOLOGY

**Turtles of North America: an Illustrated Field Guide to the Turtles of the Continental United States and Canada**

By Kyle Horner. 2024. Firefly Books. 208 pages and 264 colour photos and illustrations, 29.95 CAD, Paper.

Turtles stir excitement and curiosity in us all. They can become vehicles in young minds to think about our planet and the conservation of our wild friends. Author Kyle Horner has produced an exquisite book on the turtles of North America, which is certain to become a classic reference to these fascinating reptiles.



I was probably around six years old when I encountered my first turtle. My uncle stopped by with this strange creature in hand; he said he had been driving down the street and saw a black lump crossing the road. He stopped and soon discovered it was a turtle. I remember it being black with yellow markings with its head partially hidden inside the shell. Thinking back on this memory it was probably a Common Box Turtle (*Terrapene carolina*), like those featured on pages 162–165 of Horner’s book. I think about that turtle often, wondering where it came from—was it an escaped pet (box turtles are not native where I grew up)? I don’t recall what my uncle did with it, but I assume he gave it a better home.

This book has everything—it covers all 64 species of turtles that “inhabit Canada, the continental United States, and the ocean waters that surround them” (p. 9). The introductory section is a must read to gain a better understanding of turtle biology and ecology. Topics include turtle evolution, taxonomy, anatomy, behaviour, and conservation. Each of these topics are broken down into various subtopics, covering all aspects of turtle and tortoise ecology (all tortoises are turtles, but not all turtles are tortoises). I learned a lot reading these sections—for example, I did not realize that turtles have two ways of protecting their heads. One neck retraction strategy involves the turtle bending its neck sideways and tucking it under the front edge of its shell. Approximately 80 species of

turtles protect their necks this way; they make up the suborder Pleurodira and are commonly called “side-necked turtles”. These species occur in the Southern Hemisphere in places like Africa, South America, and Australia (pp. 13–14). The species covered in this book belong to the suborder Cryptodira, also called the “hidden-necked turtles”, that bend their necks into an ‘S’ shape and draw them back into their shells between their front legs.

The species accounts are the highlight and represent the bulk of the book. Each account is rather brief, however, and is not as comprehensive as accounts in some other turtle guides. To cover 64 species—and, I assume, keep publication costs down—the author uses short paragraphs to present information. The accounts cover a variety of topics but are succinct in their delivery; key facts are listed under bolded headings including Identification, Similar Species, Range, Habitat, Diet, Reproduction, and Conservation. The accounts feature colour photos of each species and range maps. The photos alone make up for the brief written accounts and are a visual treat. Most photos take up a half page and were likely selected for their appeal and clarity to help with identification in the field. Each range map is colour coded and, depending on the species, provides subspecies ranges, introduced populations, intergrade zones, and other information. Scattered throughout the accounts are callout boxes exploring additional topics that may be of interest to the reader. For example, page 115 features a callout on Pond Slider (*Trachemys scripta*) about how this species has been introduced into local ponds and wetlands by pet owners. (Pond Sliders are popular pets, but they generally become unmanageable when they reach adulthood. Pet owners then release them into nearby waterways.) The range map of Pond Slider illustrates these purposeful introductions well.

The sea turtle accounts are especially great reads. Most of these species are major focusses of conservation. Some are listed as Endangered under the United States’ *Endangered Species Act* and also have a global

conservation status of Critically Endangered or Vulnerable. Their diets are fascinating (e.g., jellyfish for some species), and the accounts alert us to the impacts that egg harvesting on beaches and fishing nets in the oceans are having on these wonderful creatures (pp. 189–203). The end of the book includes a Glossary, Photo Credit Section, and Index.

Overall, Horner's *Turtles of North America* is a fascinating journey into the colourful and exciting worlds of these often-misunderstood reptiles. I

recommend this guide to anyone interested in North American turtles, especially the upcoming generation that wants to learn more about the animals with which we share the world. Horner's book is a vehicle to communicate the much-needed conservation efforts required to save what global biodiversity is left.

HOWARD O. CLARK, JR.  
COLIBRI ECOLOGICAL CONSULTING, LLC,  
FRESNO, CALIFORNIA, USA

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EDITOR'S COMMENT: The statuses of Canadian turtles are listed in the following article in this issue:

**Kominek, E., O. Cornies, H. McCurdy-Adams, and A.Ø. Mooers.** 2023. Evolutionary isolation of Canadian terrestrial vertebrate species. *Canadian Field-Naturalist* 137(4): 367–380. <https://doi.org/10.22621/cfn.v137i4.2673>