

MDC Encourages Motorists to Give Turtles a Brake!

The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) encourages motorists to give turtles crossing roads a brake. Turtles are struck by cars throughout warmer months, but are at special risk this time of year because they are on the move.

Spring rains and warmer weather encourage turtles to emerge from their burrows and begin to search for food and mates, which sometimes leads them across roadways.

Turtles spend most of their lives in a small area of habitat, but sometimes wander as much as six miles. Young males make up most of the travelers as they search for territories of their own and for females. Females are also crossing roads in search of nesting sites.

Comfort is also a factor. Like other reptiles, turtles are cold-blooded so basking on warm asphalt feels good on cool spring days.

MDC encourages motorists to slow down when they see a turtle in the road and check to be sure they can safely steer around it. If helping a turtle cross a road, keep human safety as the number-one concern. Check for traffic and move the turtle across the road in the direction it is traveling.

For more information on turtles crossing roads, watch this short MDC video at youtube.com/watch?v=4KaTQ66uBhY.

MDC also advises people to leave wild turtles wild. Taking a wild turtle and keeping it as a pet usually ends in a slow death for the captive turtle.

Three-toed box turtles, ornate box turtles, and common snapping turtles are species often seen crossing roads in Missouri. While most Missouri turtles live 15 to 30 years, box turtles can live 50 to 80 years, occasionally more than 100 years. They spend their quiet lives eating plants, earthworms and insects. Their shell provides a bony shield to protect them from most natural enemies. For more information on Missouri turtles, visit MDC's online Field Guide at nature.mdc.mo.gov/discover-nature/field-guide/search/turtle.