

# Alligator Snapping Turtles

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*Macrolemmys temminickii*



In the aquatic range of fresh water turtles there are some real MONSTERS, which can grow to an enormous size. These, I describe as "Turtles with attitude". Though clearly not for the beginner, these animals can provide very interesting captive charges. To illustrate this, I set out some husbandry techniques, which have proved suitable for the long-term maintenance of such turtles.

Native of the southern states of the USA. This is one of the largest fresh water turtles in the world with adult males growing throughout their long life to sizes of 100lbs plus. In nature, they occupy the river drainage of the Mississippi and occur throughout Louisiana, Missouri, Arkansas, Texas, Alabama and Northern Florida. As a species, they are adapted to life in flooded swamps, ox bow lakes and ponds. They are relatively sedentary in habit, with limited range as individuals, providing food and water conditions are suitable. Males tend to be more mobile and in the breeding season, will move about seeking available females.

This sedentary nature means that in captivity they can be maintained in relatively small aquarium or tanks. They should however be for the most part kept singularly, as aggressive behaviour towards other turtles even their own kind, can cause serious injury.

A number of people in the USA regularly breed this species now in captivity. As a consequence, they are offered for sale as hatchlings in limited numbers. However, as hatchlings, the diminutive size belies its potential to grow to a monstrous adult! Before anybody considers taking on such an animal as a captive, they must appreciate its future dimension.

The unique feature of this species is the lure appendage on its tongue. This is used to attract fish into its gaping jaws. - A real living fish trap!

The hatchling should be maintained in shallow water. They are not good swimmers and in water too deep they may well drown. Optimum water temperature of 24-26 degrees centigrade is satisfactory. Feeding principally on fresh fish, the turtle will thrive. It is important not to use whole fish, which have previously been frozen as to my cost; I have learnt about the problem of thiaminase poisoning.

As with all fresh water turtles, water quality is very important and filtration is essential. With large carnivorous turtles, their waste requires adequate treatment to remove pollutants such as ammonia.

External canister filtration is probably the best for ease of maintenance. There are a number of manufacturers who produce good models for such a purpose.

With all aquatic turtles, large quantities of particular waste matter can cause blockage and regular attention is required to keep the flow of the filter operating at acceptable levels. From experience with this species, fish oil and other food particles collect around the rubber parts of the intake. Large Snapping turtles will eat these parts. Therefore, be careful it can result in very expensive vet bills.

The Alligator Snapping turtle along with its cousin the Common Snapping Turtle are really only suitable for institutions, or specialist keepers.