

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# An Intimidating Turtle

By Guy Belleranti



Have you ever heard of the alligator snapping turtle? This prehistoric-looking reptile, which lives in the rivers, swamps, and lakes of the southeastern United States, is sometimes called the “dinosaur of the turtle world.” Looking at a picture of the alligator snapping turtle, it's not hard to see why!

This turtle certainly looks like a small dinosaur. It has a thick tail, clawed feet, and a head with powerful, sharp, beak-like jaws. The large, spiky ridges on the top of its shell are similar to the ridges on an alligator's back.

The male alligator snapping turtle is three times larger than the female. Over two feet long, it weighs 150 to 200 pounds. This makes the alligator snapping turtle the largest fresh water turtle in North America.

It is rare for an alligator snapping turtle to leave its watery home. One of the few times you might find one of these turtles on land is when the females come out of the water to dig a nest for their eggs. In fact, the turtles spend so much time in the water that algae can grow on the their shells, providing camouflage.

During the daytime, alligator snapping turtles hide underwater, coming up every 40 to 50 minutes to breathe. Underwater, the turtles keep their mouths open, luring their prey close with a pink, worm-like appendage on their tongue. Then... snap! The alligator snapping turtle either slices its prey in half or swallows it whole. Fish, frogs, worms, snails, snakes, clams, crayfish, and other turtles are on the menu for the alligator snapping turtle. It also eats aquatic plants.

At night, the alligator snapping turtle becomes more active, walking slowly in its underwater habitat in search of food. Tasting chemicals in the water, the turtle can find nearby prey.

The adult turtles do not protect their young. Raccoons, birds, and large fish prey on both the eggs and the hatchlings.



Adult snapping turtles have no predators except humans. People hunt them for their meat and their shells. Some people also catch and sell them as exotic pets. Because of this, and because of pollution and habitat loss, alligator snapping turtles have become a threatened species. Some states have passed laws to protect them.



## About the Author

Guy Belleranti is an author of fiction, poetry, articles, puzzles, and humor for children and adults. He also works as a docent at the Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes from his experiences teaching children about the wild animals at the zoo.

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1. In which state of the United States are you most likely to find an alligator snapping turtle?

a. Oregon                      b. Louisiana  
c. Arizona                    d. New York



2. Based on what you read in the article, provide one piece of evidence that shows alligator snapping turtles spend most of their time in the water.

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3. Which of the following is one of the few times you might see an adult snapping turtle out of the water?

a. when it is looking for prey to eat  
b. when it is searching for a mate  
c. when a female lays her eggs  
d. when a male wants to fight another male

4. Describe a trick the alligator snapping turtle uses to lure its prey underwater.

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5. Based on the information in the article, which category does the alligator snapping turtle fall into?

a. omnivore (eats meat and plants)                      b. carnivore (meat-eater)  
c. herbivore (plant-eater)                                  d. decomposer (eats dead materials)

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Fill in the missing letters to create a vocabulary word from the article.  
Then write the full word on the line. Be sure you spell each word correctly.

1.    \_\_\_ u a t \_\_\_ c

**hint:** relating to water

\_\_\_\_\_

2.    c \_\_\_ a \_\_\_ f \_\_\_ s h

**hint:** freshwater animals resembling small lobsters

\_\_\_\_\_

3.    e \_\_\_ o \_\_\_ c

**hint:** from the wild; strange and foreign

\_\_\_\_\_

4.    \_\_\_ a t \_\_\_ h l i n \_\_\_ s

**hint:** baby turtles

\_\_\_\_\_

5.    p r \_\_\_ d \_\_\_ t \_\_\_ r s

**hint:** animals that prey on other animals

\_\_\_\_\_

6.    c a \_\_\_ o \_\_\_ f l \_\_\_ g e

**hint:** markings or coverings that help an animal  
blend in with its surroundings

\_\_\_\_\_

7.    a \_\_\_ p e \_\_\_ d \_\_\_ g e

**hint:** an attachment that serves a special purpose

\_\_\_\_\_

8.    \_\_\_ a \_\_\_ i t a \_\_\_

**hint:** an animal's natural home or environment

\_\_\_\_\_

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# An Intimidating Turtle

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In the article, “An Intimidating Turtle,” you learned that the alligator snapping turtle is a prehistoric-looking animal that is sometimes called the “dinosaur of the turtle world.”



Using the information in the article, describe several physical characteristics of the alligator snapping turtle that are similar to those of a dinosaur.

[illegible]

## ANSWER KEY

# An Intimidating Turtle

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1. In which state of the United States are you most likely to find an alligator snapping turtle? b.

a. Oregon  
c. Arizona  
b. Louisiana  
d. New York

2. Based on what you read in the article, provide one piece of evidence that shows alligator snapping turtles spend most of their time in the water.

Alligator snapping turtles spend so much time in the water that algae grows on their shells.

3. Which of the following is one of the few times you might see an adult snapping turtle out of the water? c.

a. when it is looking for prey to eat  
b. when it is searching for a mate  
c. when a female lays her eggs  
d. when a male wants to fight another male

4. Describe a trick the alligator snapping turtle uses to lure its prey underwater.

The turtles use a pink, worm-like appendage to lure prey right into their mouths.

5. Based on the information in the article, which category does the alligator snapping turtle fall into? a.

a. omnivore (eats meat and plants)  
b. carnivore (meat-eater)  
c. herbivore (plant-eater)  
d. decomposer (eats dead materials)

# An Intimidating Turtle

A large tortoise, likely a Galapagos tortoise, shown from a side profile. It has a dark, textured shell with prominent scutes and thick, wrinkled skin on its head and limbs. The tortoise is facing left.