

Guide to Aging and Sexing Box Turtles



Photo by Lisa Prowant

To age box turtles, students need to count the rings on each scute on the turtle's carapace. The **carapace** is the hard, upper shell of the turtle and the **scutes** are the bony plates making up the carapace. For box turtles aged 1–14 years, there will be one ring for each year of the turtle's life. In the photo above, each ring on a single scute is highlighted in green. The box turtle shown here is 9 years old!



Photos by Lisa Prowant

For box turtles 15 years and older, the rings get close together or may be worn away. For these reasons, biologists often just categorize older box turtles as "15+ years". Older box turtles also often develop deep grooves between their scutes, as indicated by the green arrows in the two photos above .

Male

Female



Photos by Lisa Prowant

To sex box turtles, students need to observe the shape of the plastron and the carapace. The **plastron** is the part of the turtle's shell forming the underside or belly. Male box turtles have a flared carapace (indicated by the green arrow in the far left shell), a depression in the plastron (indicated by the green arrow in the second shell from the left), and their carapace is "pinched" at the hind end. Female box turtles do not have a flared carapace and they have a more domed carapace. Keep in mind, though, that these sex differences are not apparent in box turtles aged 7 or younger!