

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Box turtles

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

If anyone has first hand experience with a reptile, it's probably a box turtle, the state reptile of North Carolina. While box turtles may grace numerous classrooms or home terrariums, the truth is scientists don't know a lot about the status of box turtle populations and fear they may be declining.

In order to get a clearer picture of the state of box turtles, the Box Turtle Collaborative was recently formed by UNC-Greensboro, Davidson College, and a handful of state agencies including the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. One of the projects of the Box Turtle Collaborative is an effort to engage citizens in monitoring turtle populations. Volunteers spend a day learning protocols for collecting data and will periodically monitor box turtles at a particular site, collecting data on the turtles and then permanently marking them. The collected data will be submitted via the internet to Davidson College, which will then make them available to researchers. Recapturing marked turtles reveals information about population size, movement patterns, and longevity. In a similar project on Long Island, a box turtle was found that had been marked in 1921.

The effort should provide the first state-wide systematic inventory of box turtles, which can then serve as a baseline for future research. 2008 was the pilot year for the project, with nearly a dozen sites and project leaders across the state.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples