

Snapping turtles finding refuge in urban areas while habitats are being polluted

August 27 2013



Snapping turtles are animals that can live in almost any aquatic habitat as long as their basic needs for survival are met. Credit: Bill Peterman/University of Missouri

In the Midwest, people have a fear of encountering snapping turtles while swimming in local ponds, lakes and rivers. Now in a new study, a University of Missouri researcher has found that snapping turtles are surviving in urban areas as their natural habitats are being polluted or developed for construction projects. One solution is for people to stop

using so many chemicals that are eventually dumped into the waterways, the scientist said.

"Snapping turtles are animals that can live in almost any [aquatic habitat](#) as long as their basic needs for survival are met," said Bill Peterman, a post-doctoral researcher in the Division of Biological Sciences at MU. "Unfortunately, suitable aquatic habitats for turtles are being degraded by pollution or completely lost due to development. We found that snapping turtles can persist in urbanized areas, despite the potential for more interaction with humans."

Peterman said that reducing negative inputs, such as waste and [harmful chemicals](#), into waterways will help restore snapping turtles' habitats. Engaging in this type of environmental action also will increase biodiversity in those habitats and improve the quality of life to all species that call those habitats home.

However, even though turtles are living in urban areas, Peterman says people have nothing to fear.

"Everyone has a snapping turtle story, but some are just too far-fetched and lead to false accusations," Peterman said. "In reality, snapping turtles aren't aggressive animals and won't bite unless they are provoked. So, if you should happen to see one around your property, simply leave it alone and let it go about its business."



Peterman and his colleagues found that snapping turtles are surviving in urban areas as their natural habitats are being polluted or developed for construction projects. Credit: Bill Peterman/University of Missouri

The study took place in the Central Canal that flows through urban Indianapolis; researchers used tracking devices on large snapping turtles to monitor turtle movements. Peterman and his colleagues found that snapping turtles used all parts of the Central Canal, but were particularly dependent upon [forested areas](#).



While snapping turtles are not aggressive animals, researchers warn not to approach the animals if they are spotted nearby. Credit: Bill Peterman/University of Missouri

"While we didn't study whether the snapping turtle populations were increasing or decreasing, we regularly saw hatchling and juvenile snapping turtles," Peterman said. "Snapping turtles may not be the first animals that come to mind when thinking about urban wildlife, but if we continue to improve waterways in more places, such as big cities, than the species can coexist peacefully."

More information: The study, "Movement and Habitat Use of the Snapping Turtle in an Urban Landscape, was published in *Urban Ecosystems*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

Citation: Snapping turtles finding refuge in urban areas while habitats are being polluted (2013, August 27) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-08-snapping-turtles-refuge-urban-areas.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.