A Pocket Guide to *Kansas Amphibians, Turtles and Lizards*

By Travis W. Taggart and J. Daren Riedle

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Three-toed Box Turtle
©Travis Taggart

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Introduction

Worldwide there are approximately 12,500 species of salamanders, frogs, lizards, and turtles. Most of them live in tropical regions. There are 536 species found in the US. Kansas has 61 species; 22 Frogs (including toads), 9 Salamanders, 14 Turtles and 16 Lizards.

Twelve of these have a nearly statewide distribution. Ten species have a primarily western distribution in the state and twenty-six are restricted to the eastern one-third of Kansas. No species are venomous. Fourteen are designated as Endangered, Threatened, or Species in Need of Conservation by the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism. Three introduced species are reproducing in Kansas. All Kansas salamanders, frogs, lizards, and turtles are permanent, year-round residents and none travel far from suitable habitat.

This pocket guide includes all salamanders, frogs, lizards, and turtles found in Kansas. A separate pocket guide is available which covers the 41 species of snakes found in Kansas. Keep these booklets with you as you travel across Kansas, and keep an eye out for their subjects when exploring on rainy nights or around rocky areas and wetlands.

Few people are on the fence when it comes to how they feel about amphibians and reptiles. These relatively small animals will typically elicit a strong response from most people, whether that be fascination or fear. Unfortunately, some popular misconceptions help perpetuate the fears. Some examples are:

- *Toads can't give you warts; the raised bumps on their backs only look like warts, and they aren't contagious.*
- *Turtles are not effective predators of healthy fish.*
- *Turtles won't suffocate if turned on their backs, though they would probably appreciate being righted.*

- *Not all Kansas lizards can regenerate their tails when lost.*
- *Kissing a frog will not turn it into a prince, though it might appreciate it.*

Some other interesting facets of their natural history are:

- *Toads carry water with them, and are likely to release it when picked up; they're not peeing on you!*
- *While superficially similar, lizards are reptiles (with scales and clawed toes) and salamanders are amphibians (with smooth, often moist, skin and no claws on their toes).*
- *Kansas amphibians lack the teeth and jaw strength for you to be concerned about their bite; however, several large lizards and all turtles are capable of giving painful bites when handled.*

Salamanders, frogs, lizards, and turtles are fascinating animals and important elements of our natural history. If you encounter one, watch, study, or even try to catch it. They're shy and easily frightened, but if you're lucky they will carry on with what they were doing and you may learn something.

©Bob Gress

■ *American Toad* *©Suzanne Collins*

American Toad

(Anaxyrus americanus)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 4 inches.

Description: The black spots on their back typically contain only one wart (rarely two or more). The belly is often heavily spotted, especially toward the throat. In extreme southeast Kansas the toads are smaller and unspotted above and below, with a reddish cast over their head, back, and legs. This morph is found from here to northeast Texas and southern Indiana.

Habits: During March and April rains, American Toads breed in semi-permanent ponds, ditches, and even tire ruts. The call is a long musical trill lasting 5 to 50 seconds. Eggs are laid in long strings. Outside of the breeding season they can be found all over the eastern third of Kansas from forests to backyard gardens. They seek cover by day, and search for prey at night.

■ *Great Plains Toad* *©Travis Taggart*

Great Plains Toad

(Anaxyrus cognatus)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 4 inches.

Description: This toad has large, paired, elongated blotches on its back that may be black, brown, or green. These contrast sharply with a lighter background or border color. Each blotch contain several small warts. The chest is white and unspotted.

Habits: Following spring rains from April to June, male Great Plains Toads call from semi-permanent ponds to attract mates. The males use their frontward-projecting, sausage-shaped vocal sac to produce their call, which is a loud, metallic trill that lasts 20-50 seconds. A female may lay up to 20,000 eggs, which hatch in two to three days. Eggs are laid in strings. The young toads transform and leave the water four to six weeks later.

Chihuahuan Green Toad ©Travis Taggart

Chihuahuan Green Toad

(Anaxyrus debilis)

Threatened Species in Kansas

Size: Length in Kansas up to 1.7 inches.

Description: A tiny flat toad with a dorsal color of green or yellow with small black spots that occasionally fuse together to form bars or reticulations. The ventral surface is white or cream and is unspotted. The throats of chorusing males are black.

Habits: This grassland and canyon toad hides in burrows, vegetation, crevices, and under rocks; they emerge at night following summer rains from July to September to congregate at temporary canyon pools or upland wallows to breed. The call is a cricket-like trill that lasts 3-7 seconds. Eggs are laid singly, or in short strings and often attached to vegetation. While they do forage on humid nights and even though they may be locally abundant, they are seldom encountered outside of the breeding season.

■ *Fowler's Toad* *©Suzanne Collins*

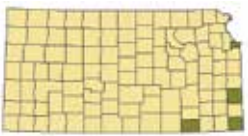
Fowler's Toad

(Anaxyrus fowleri)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 3.5 inches.

Description: Fowler's Toads have dorsal spots, typically in pairs, each containing three or more warts. There are no greatly enlarged warts on the tibia as with the Woodhouse's Toad and their belly is unspotted or has one spot between the arms, in contrast to the American Toad.

Habits: They are usually found in association with river bottoms and flood plains but also frequent woodland borders. They dig burrows into the earth during the day or hide under objects. They come out on humid nights to eat insects. Aside from the Ozark Plateau of southeast Kansas, their distribution in eastern Kansas is poorly understood. The call is a nasal *waaaaah* lasting up to 5 seconds. They call from late April through May and the eggs are laid in strings.



■ *Red-spotted Toad* *©Travis Taggart*

Red-spotted Toad

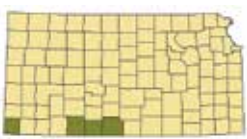
(Anaxyrus punctatus)

Species in Need of Conservation

Size: Length in Kansas up to 2.4 inches.

Description: A small toad with a flattened head and body. The paratoid gland (behind each eye and approximately the same size) is round (not elongated as in our other toad species). Most Kansas specimens are brown, tan, or light gray and their warts may or may not be tipped with red or orange. The belly is cream colored and without spots. As with all Kansas toads, the underside of breeding males' throats are darkened.

Habits: They search for prey at night and remain under cover during the day. Red-spotted Toads are slow moving, more apt to walk or crawl with only occasional short hops. However, they are excellent climbers in the rocky canyons they occupy. The call is a 4 to 10 second musical trill that can be heard along intermittent canyon pools following rains in June and July. The eggs are laid in short strings.



■ *Woodhouse's Toad* *©Suzanne Collins*

Woodhouse's Toad

(Anaxyrus woodhousii)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 3.75 inches.

Description: The ground color varies from light gray to tan and is dotted with unpaired, black-edged brown spots. Each spot contains two or more warts. The belly is cream-colored and unspotted. Young toadlets typically have red-tipped warts.

Habits: Like most toads, they remain hidden/buried during the day and are most active on humid nights. They can often be found around buildings foraging under lights that attract insects. They frequent a great variety of habitats, but seem to be most abundant in sandy areas. The call is a low-pitched nasal waaaaah that can be heard following rains from March through June.

■ *Branchard's Cricket Frog* *©Travis Taggart*

Blanchard's Cricket Frog

(Acris blanchardi)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 1.5 inches.

Description: This frog is highly variable in color. They may have a gray to dark brown background with a tan, red, brown, or green blotches or stripe down the back. A dark triangle is usually found between the eyes, and the dorsal skin is warty while the ventral skin is unspotted and smooth.

Habits: They inhabit open edges of permanent ponds, lakes, streams and rivers. They can be very numerous on partially vegetated mud flats or sandy shorelines. When chased, they are quick to jump into the water, but very quickly return to the shoreline. Males call day and night from late spring through summer. The call sounds like clicking two marbles together.

■ *Cope's Gray Treefrog* *©J. Daren Riedle*

Cope's Gray Treefrog

(Hyla chrysoscelis)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 2 inches.

Description: Vary in color from mottled gray to light green but their color can change depending on activity and environment. There is usually a light spot beneath the eye. The inner thigh is bright yellow or orange, but this is seldom visible without examination. Their skin secretions can be very irritating to the eyes, so wash your hands after you handle them.

Habits: The Gray Treefrog is morphologically indistinguishable from the Cope's Gray Treefrog and both species occupy similar ranges, however the Cope's Gray Treefrog is more widely distributed in Kansas. The two species are best distinguished by their call during breeding season; the Cope's Gray Treefrog having a faster trill. Found throughout the eastern third of Kansas.

■ *Gray Treefrog* *©Travis Taggart*

Gray Treefrog

(Hyla versicolor)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 2 inches.

Description: Like the Cope's Gray Treefrog, the dorsal surface is rough and lightly sprinkled with warts. The ground color may be shades of brown, gray, or green, with stipple-edged black blotches. The large wet toepads help the frog to adhere to smooth bark or man-made structures.

Habits: Much of their activity period is spent high in trees where they hide by day and forage for insects on humid nights. They are most often encountered during the breeding season, when they call from vegetation surrounding wetlands in April and May. Known from the Verdigris, Marias des Cygnes, and Kansas River drainages in Kansas.

■ *Spotted Chorus Frog* *©Suzanne Collins*

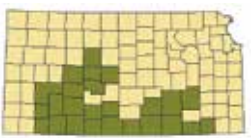
Spotted Chorus Frog

(Pseudacris clarkii)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 1.2 inches.

Description: Spotted Chorus Frogs are grey to olive green in color, with black-edged dark green blotches on their backs. They often have a triangle-shaped green blotch on top of the head between their eyes. Their bellies are light-colored and unspotted, but the throats of chorusing males are darkened.

Habits: They are found in open prairie grasslands and pastures. They breed in shallow ponds, cattle tanks, and ephemeral streams. As winter approaches, they burrow under thatch and loose earth until March and April rains bring them out again. The call is a raspy trill wrraaay-wrraaay-wrraaay repeated 20-30 times rapidly. They call from March into June.



■ *Spring Peeper* *©Suzanne Collins*

Spring Peeper

(Pseudacris crucifer)

Species in Need of Conservation

Size: Length in Kansas up to 1.2 inches.

Description: The ground color may be various shades of brown, gray, light green, yellow or orange, and it is marked by a dark brown cross on its back and dark bands on its legs. Its unspotted belly is cream or white. It has wet toepads that aid it in climbing.

Habits: This is the first frog heard in Kansas each year. Males gather at small ephemeral pools by the hundreds following rains from February to April and begin calling (a short, repeated, high-pitched 'peep') in the hope of attracting mates.

■ *Boreal Chorus Frog* *©Suzanne Collins*

Boreal Chorus Frog

(Pseudacris maculata)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 1.5 inches.

Description: The ground color may be various shades of brown, gray or green. Typically have three dark brown stripes running down the back, but the stripes may be broken to form spots. Their belly is yellowish, cream or white and there may be dark markings on the throat and chest, especially on calling males.

Habits: They are typically found in low-lying vegetated areas after significant late winter or early spring rains when they congregate in large numbers to chorus and mate. The call is a clicking trill (similar to running your fingernail along the teeth of a comb) lasting 2 to 5 seconds, which rises in inflection. They call from February into May. Like all chorus frogs, they are seldom found outside of the breeding season as they seek refuge under cover and only emerge after rains or humid nights to forage for small invertebrates.

Strecker's Chorus Frog ©Travis Taggart

Strecker's Chorus Frog

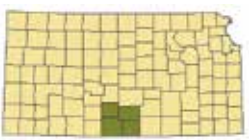
(Pseudacris streckeri)

Threatened Species in Kansas

Size: Length in Kansas up to 1.9 inches.

Description: This is the largest of the chorus frogs in Kansas. They are relatively stocky with a light gray to brown ground color punctuated with several dark blotches, and a similarly colored dark spot directly below the eye. When cold, they appear much darker. Prefers sandy riparian habitats.

Habits: Males congregate to chorus in ephemeral pools, ditches, and flooded fields following rains from February to April. The call is a single metallic note that is quickly repeated. Females soon follow and lay several hundred eggs in small packets attached to submerged sticks and twigs. The tadpoles hatch within five days, and within the next six weeks gradually lose their tails and gills, grow legs and lungs, and leave the pools as little versions of the adults.



■ *Eastern Narrow-mouthed Toad* *©Suzanne Collins*

Eastern Narrow-mouthed Toad

(Gastrophryne carolinensis)

Threatened Species in Kansas

Size: Length in Kansas up to 1.4 inches.

Description: A small, flattened frog with a pointed snout and a fold of skin across the back of the head. Their coloration can be extremely variable, but typically consists of a light reddish to brown ground color with and indistinct dark blotch beginning between the eyes and expanding down the back to the legs. The belly is usually heavily mottled with dark brown.

Habits: They feed on a variety of invertebrates but particularly ants. They breed in the summer and adults converge at temporary water bodies, including ditches, flooded grasslands, and streams to breed on rainy summer nights. The call sounds like the bleat of a lamb lasting 1 to 4 seconds. Unlike most other Kansas frogs their singly laid eggs float on the surface of the water. They are secretive and outside of the breeding season are usually found by overturning rocks, boards, or logs in woodland habitats.

Western Narrow-mouthed Toad ©Dan Fogell

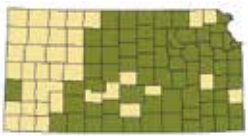
Western Narrow-mouthed Toad

(Gastrophryne olivacea)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 1.6 inches.

Description: A squat, flat-bodied frog, with a sharply pointed snout and fold of skin across the back of its head and behind its eyes. They are often uniformly gray, tan, or olive on top, with occasional small black spots on the back or legs. Their bellies are lighter colored and typically unspotted.

Habits: Terrestrial, nocturnal, and secretive, but get together in flooded areas following late spring and summer rains to mate. Their call sounds like the metallic bleat of a sheep and lasts 1-5 seconds. Where their range overlaps with Texas Brown Tarantulas, these two seemingly unlikely associates are often found together under large rocks.



■ *Crawfish Frog* *©Suzanne Collins*

Crawfish Frog

(Lithobates areolatus)

Species in Need of Conservation

Size: Length in Kansas up to 4.8 inches.

Description: This large frog has a reticulate pattern of light-edged dark blotches covering the dorsal surface of its head and back. The pattern on the limbs is elongated and is often banded. It has a raised ridge of skin running down each side of the back from its eyes to its legs, but it is hard to see due to the frog's pattern. The belly is white to cream colored with speckling to various degrees along the sides.

Habits: Despite their relatively large size, these frogs are seldom seen. They emerge from crayfish burrows to breed in flooded fields during early spring and then return to the burrow for the remainder of the year. Their call is a low snore that can be heard for over a mile on still nights.

■ *Plains Leopard Frog* *©Suzanne Collins*

Plains Leopard Frog

(Lithobates blairi)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 4.2 inches.

Description: Ground color is brown to green with darker, light-edged, irregular spots along the back, sides, and limbs. It has a distinct light line along the upper jaw. The tympanum (ear drum) has a light spot in the center. They have a light-colored fold of skin running down each side from the eye to the legs, which is broken and offset toward the center near the legs. The cream colored belly is unspotted, and the groin and ventral surface of the thighs have a noticeably yellow color.

Habits: Frequently seen sitting on vegetation mats at the edge of shallow streams and ponds, or with their eyes just breaking the surface. They breed in late spring in ponds and ditches where they deposit a large mass of eggs that floats near the surface. The call consists of 2-4 repeated guttural notes *chuuuck-chuuuck-chuuuck*. These frogs will forage far from water during the summer in search of invertebrate food.

■ *American Bullfrog* *©Travis Taggart*

American Bullfrog

(Lithobates catesbeianus)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 6.5 inches.

Description: This frog is the largest in Kansas. They have a light to dark green ground color with little to heavy dark brown mottling on the head, back, and limbs. They do not have a raised ridge of skin along the sides from the eyes to the legs. The eardrums of males are much larger than the size of the eye.

Habits: They breed on the surface of shallow, permanent water covered with vegetation. Males make distinctive, resonant, low-pitched '*jug-o-rum*' call both day and night during late spring and through the summer. Females may lay up to 20,000 eggs in one year. The eggs hatch in less than a week and the developing tadpole will remain aquatic for one to three years until transforming into a young semi-aquatic frog. Bullfrogs are opportunistic predators, and prey on any animal they can fit into their mouths (including smaller American Bullfrogs).

■ *Green Frog* *©Travis Taggart*

Green Frog

(Lithobates clamitans)

Threatened Species in Kansas

Size: Length in Kansas up to 3.5 inches.

Description: These frogs are various shades of green, though young individuals may have some black spots. Usually there is dark mottling under legs and head. It has two raised ridges of skin down each side of its back. The eardrums of males are much larger than their eyes.

Habits: Their summer breeding call sounds like the pluck of a loose banjo string and can be heard both day and night. They breed in permanent ponds and along streams with vegetated borders. The adults eat invertebrates and occasionally small frogs and fish. Rather than chase their prey, they sit and eat whatever comes by.

Pickerel Frog *©Suzanne Collins*

Pickerel Frog

(Lithobates palustris)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 2.8 inches.

Description: This frog has paired, light-edged, squarish, brown blotches down its back on a tan to light brown background, and irregular brown blotches along the sides. The belly is cream colored and mottled under the chin and upper chest. The lower inner thigh and groin area is washed with bright yellow that may extend to the lower legs. They have an unbroken light-colored ridge of raised skin from the eye to the legs.

Habits: The only three specimens of this frog known from Kansas were collected prior to 1933, although they do persist in nearby southwest Missouri. In 2000 an unsuccessful repatriation (of adults and eggs) was attempted along Shoal Creek, Cherokee County. The call is low-pitched snore that last 2-3 seconds.

■ *Southern Leopard Frog* *©Suzanne Collins*

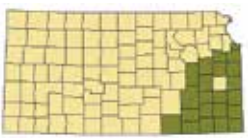
Southern Leopard Frog

(Lithobates sphenocephalus)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 3.2 inches.

Description: They have a light tan to green background with many dark brown spots having diffuse light white to green edges. Often the back is heavily washed with green to the extent it may obfuscate some blotches. The upper jaw has a light stripe and there is a continuous, light-colored, raised ridge of skin that extends down each side of the body from the eyes to the legs.

Habits: Active both day and night and can be seen in large numbers on rainy nights. A heavy early spring rain will prompt explosive breeding by these frogs, and their chuckling call can be heard at night. Unlike every other species of frog in Kansas, they are also known to breed again in the fall.



■ *Plains Spadefoot* *©Travis Taggart*

Plains Spadefoot

(Spea bombifrons)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 2.5 inches.

Description: They have a pattern of irregular (sometimes striped) greenish to brown blotches on their head, back, and limbs against a light gray to tan background. The back may be covered with small red to yellow tipped warts. Their bellies are white and unspotted. The pupils are vertically slit in bright light and there is a hard bump or 'boss' between the eyes on the top of their head.

Habits: They are explosive breeders. They emerge following heavy spring thunderstorms and congregate in ephemeral wetlands. The call is a short raspy bleat repeated every ½ to 1 seconds. Females lay up to 2000 eggs in small round clutches attached to submerged vegetation. The rate of development is temperature dependent but is much faster than in any other Kansas frog. Under warm conditions, the transformation from eggs to terrestrial toadlet may occur in fourteen days.

Western Tiger Salamander *©Suzanne Collins*

Western Tiger Salamander

(Ambystoma mavortium)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 11.5 inches.

Description: Terrestrial adults have tan to yellow transverse bars on a dark brown to black ground color. The bars vary in thickness. The aquatic larvae are green to gray with occasional light diffuse spots, a finned tail, and bushy gills just behind the head.

Habits: They spend a substantial portion of their adult life underground in burrows or under thatch. They are primarily nocturnal and are opportunistic feeders on rainy nights when they prowl for invertebrates. Most often the adults are terrestrial, but under extremely dry conditions this salamander may become mature in the larval body form. This is called neoteny. In 1994, the Western Tiger Salamander was recognized by the Kansas Legislature as the official state amphibian of Kansas.

Small-mouthed Salamander *©Suzanne Collins*

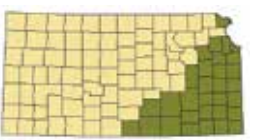
Small-mouthed Salamander

(Ambystoma texanum)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 5.75 inches.

Description: They have a relatively small head and a blunt tail. Their dorsal background color is dark brown with whitish diffuse flecks on top that become more numerous along the sides. The belly is dark.

Habits: Primarily inhabit forested bottomlands, adjacent prairies, and associated wetlands. They generally remain hidden in burrows or under cover of leaves, logs, or thatch but move en masse during periods of heavy rain or high humidity year round. They breed in temporary shallow bodies of water in spring.



Eastern Tiger Salamander *©Suzanne Collins*

Eastern Tiger Salamander

(Ambystoma tigrinum)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 10 inches.

Description: Very similar to the closely related Western Tiger Salamander in size and appearance, but with much smaller spots that seldom form elongated bars. The spots are never in any set shape, size, position, or pattern. They have a rather large head and a broad rounded snout. Their eyes are round, and their belly is usually yellowish with dark pigment encroaching along the sides.

Habits: They live underground most of the year and dig their own burrows, unlike most other species that utilize burrows of other animals. This allows them to escape the temperature extremes on the surface and may explain why they have such a wide array of habitat types. They are seldom reported in Kansas and persist in small localized populations.

Long-tailed Salamander *©Suzanne Collins*

Long-tailed Salamander

(Eurycea longicauda)

Threatened Species in Kansas

Size: Length in Kansas up to 5.6 inches.

Description: A slender yellow-green to yellow-brown salamander with scattered black blotches along its back that become more profuse along the sides. The belly is yellow to cream and usually unspotted.

Habits: Lives near cool streams and spring seeps in rocky forested uplands and valleys. They are partial to the twilight zone of caves and may be found well within caves. The gilled larvae are often abundant in the nearby streams. Adults emerge from rocky hiding places on humid nights and feed on invertebrates.

Cave Salamander *©J. Daren Riedle*

Cave Salamander

(Eurycea lucifuga)

Endangered Species in Kansas

Size: Length in Kansas up to 6.5 inches.

Description: A moderate-sized salamander with a wide head and randomly scattered black spots on the body. The ground color is red to orange and transitions to cream near the unspotted belly.

Habits: Primarily found among the crevices and rocks in the twilight zone of limestone caves. They may also be found deeper within caves, as well as under rocks, logs, and plant debris near caves and springs. Adults and juveniles are nocturnal and forage for invertebrates on humid nights. The eggs are attached to rocks in caves and underground spring pools during the fall and winter, and the hatchlings are washed out into springs and streams where they grow until they transform into miniature adults.

Grotto Salamander *©Travis Taggart*

Grotto Salamander

(Eurycea spelaea)

Endangered Species in Kansas

Size: Length in Kansas up to 3.4 inches.

Description: Only their small, lightly-pigmented, gilled larvae have been found in Kansas. The transformed, pinkish-white, adult salamanders are blind, obligate, cave-dwellers. The reduced eyes appear as dark spots visible through the partially fused eyelids. The larvae have functional eyes.

Habits: Adults only inhabit caves, while the larvae are found both in cave streams and associated external springs and streams. Adults are known to live for at least twelve years in captivity, but their lifespan in the wild is unknown. Transformed adults have never been observed in Kansas.

Red River Mudpuppy *©Suzanne Collins*

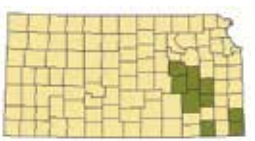
Red River Mudpuppy

(Necturus louisianensis)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 12 inches.

Description: Completely aquatic and gilled throughout life. They are light yellowish brown to tan dorsally, but occasionally possess a dark dorsal stripe bordered by lighter stripes. The back and sides of the belly have large dark spots or blotches. The midline of the belly is usually light colored and unspotted.

Habits: They mainly eat small aquatic invertebrates and fish. Sometimes caught by anglers fishing in rivers and streams. Juveniles may be found in submerged leaf litter in the slower areas of rivers and streams in southeast Kansas.



Mudpuppy *©Suzanne Collins*

Mudpuppy

(Necturus maculosus)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 15 inches.

Description: Rusty brown to grey dorsally, with a belly that is white, gray, yellow, or brown, sometimes with dark spots. They have bushy external gills and a large, broad and vertically compressed tail. A dark stripe occurs on the side of the head, passing through the eye and sometimes extending down the side.

Habits: They are found in both clear and silted waters of lakes, reservoirs, rivers, and streams. They are most numerous where retreats such as flat rock slabs or logs are numerous and the bottom is muddy. Adults prefer well-aerated water downstream or to the sides of riffles in the Marias des Cygnes drainage in Kansas.

Eastern Newt eft ©Suzanne Collins

Eastern Newt

(Notophthalmus viridescens)

Threatened Species in Kansas

adult ©Travis Taggart

Size: Length in Kansas up to 4 inches.

Description: Aquatic larvae have flattened tails, olive colored skin, and feathery gills. They transform into a dry, rough-skinned, terrestrial "eft" stage after 2 to 5 months as an aquatic larva. The eft is reddish-orange in color with two rows of black-bordered red spots along the sides. It has well-developed lungs, limbs, and eyelids. After 2 to 3 years on land the eft return to the water, and transform into an adult. The adults are yellowish-brown to greenish-brown and have black-bordered red spots. The belly color is yellow with black spots, and the tail becomes broad, finned, and vertically flattened.

Habits: Adults remain at the breeding site for the rest of their life, if the water is permanent, or spend dry seasons on land and move back to the water in spring. They feed on any invertebrate that they can fit in their mouth.

Snapping Turtle ©J. Daren Riedle

Snapping Turtle

(Chelydra serpentina)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 16 inches; weight over 35 lbs.

Description: Carapace is brown or olive and flecked with black; although it is often covered by live green algae. The rear portion is sharply serrated. Plastron is much smaller than most turtles, cross-shaped, and yellowish to tan. It has a large head with a pointed snout. The tail has many large 'spikes'.

Habits: They are slow-moving on land and appear short-tempered, standing their ground and attempting lunging strikes (much to the detriment of their relations with people). They are highly aquatic, seldom bask, but are often spotted when their snout and eyes break the water's surface as they stealthily come up for a breath of air and to see what is happening above water. They are adept swimmers but, even so, if the water is clear enough, they are often seen crawling along the bottom of the ponds and streams they live in.

Alligator Snapping Turtle ©J. Daren Riedle

Alligator Snapping Turtle

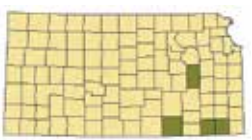
(Macrochelys temminckii)

Species in Need of Conservation

Size: Length in Kansas up to 32 inches; weight over 150 lbs.

Description: The Alligator Snapping Turtle is the largest turtle in the United States (largest freshwater turtle in the world). It has three ridges of enlarged spiked scales along its back, and a very large head with a strongly hooked beak. Unlike the Snapping Turtle, the head has some scales on it. Another distinguishing characteristic is a row of five small scales on either side of the carapace just above the marginal scales. Its plastron is much smaller (relative to the carapace) than most turtles.

Habits: Feeds on fish, smaller turtles, mussels, and crayfish, but occasionally carrion and fruit are consumed. They will move in search for food, but they often feed as ambush predators as they sit on a stream bottom with their mouth open. Their tongue has a flesh-colored, worm-shaped appendage that they wiggle to lure a hungry fish. They seldom leave the water except to lay eggs. The females are half the size of the males.



Painted Turtle ©Suzanne Collins

©Suzanne Collins

Painted Turtle

(Chrysemys picta)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 8 inches.

Description: As their name suggests, Painted Turtles are colorful. The top shell is smooth and dark brown to green, with red to yellow marking along the outer edges. The margins of the carapace are smooth; not serrated. The plastron is red to orange with a series of black and yellow markings along the center. The head and legs have many yellow to red stripes and spots.

Habits: Painted Turtles are most often seen basking on logs in ponds and backwaters. Active on warm sunny days year-round. Females lay 2-8 eggs in late spring. Though the eggs hatch in late summer, the young turtles often remain in the underground nest until the following spring. The adults are primarily vegetarian, however the hatchlings will eat a wider variety of food items including small invertebrates and carrion.

Northern Map Turtle ©J. Daren Riedle

Northern Map Turtle

(Graptemys geographica)

Threatened Species in Kansas

Size: Length in Kansas up to 10.5 inches.

Description: Northern Map Turtles derive their name from the lines on their carapace, which resemble roadways or waterways on a map. The margins of the carapace are serrated. The head, limbs, and tail are brownish and covered with yellow stripes. Can be differentiated from other map turtles in Kansas by the yellow spot behind each eye. Females have broader heads and are twice the size of males.

Habits: Northern Map Turtles prefer slow moving waters where they spend most of their day basking on logs or other partially submerged structures. Diet consists primarily of snails, mussels, crayfish, and aquatic insects. Diet may vary between males and females, as the larger size and enlarged head of females allows them to eat larger snails, mussels, and freshwater clams. Females nest in sand or soft soil along the water's edge, laying clutches of 10-16 eggs. Eggs hatch in late summer or the following spring.

Ouachita Map Turtle *©Suzanne Collins*

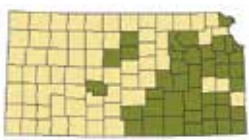
Ouachita Map Turtle

(Graptemys ouachitensis)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 10 inches.

Description: The Ouachita Map Turtle has a keeled ridge down the midline of its carapace, with black, prominent knobs along the ridge. The head, limbs, and tail are brownish and covered with yellow stripes. Can be differentiated from other map turtles in Kansas by neck stripes that reach the eye, and three spots on the side of the head. The upper spot is located behind the eye, the second below the eye, and the third on the lower jaw below the second. In northern populations, the first and second spots may be enlarged to form a crescent. The crescent is wider than that observed in the False Map Turtle, and the lower jaw spot should still be conspicuous.

Habits: Can often be observed from bridges over the streams where they occur. Like other map turtles, the males are much smaller than the females.



False Map Turtle *©J. Daren Riedle*

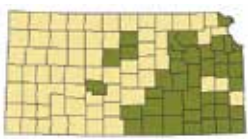
False Map Turtle

(Graptemys pseudogeographica)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 10 inches.

Description: As with the very similar-looking Ouachita Map Turtle, a keeled ridge runs down the midline of the carapace, with black, prominent knobs along the ridge. The head, limbs, and tail are brownish and covered with yellow stripes. Can be differentiated from other map turtles in Kansas by a bold yellow bar (behind the eye) or a thin crescent (along the side) that does not allow neck stripes to reach the eye.

Habits: False Map Turtles occur in a wide variety of aquatic habitats, including lakes, rivers, streams, and ponds. Predominantly eat snails, mussels, and aquatic insects, although females will also eat a considerable amount of aquatic vegetation.



River Cooter ©J. Daren Riedle

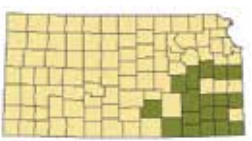
River Cooter

(Pseudemys concinna)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 14 inches.

Description: Numerous yellow lines along the head and neck. The carapace is dark with a network of yellow lines. The rear edge of the carapace is jagged. The plastron is yellow and typically unpatterned, though it may occasionally have dark smudges or circles. Females are considerably larger than males.

Habits: The River Cooter inhabits large rivers, streams, and lakes with abundant logs and brush for basking. Adults feed primarily on aquatic vegetation, while juveniles eat considerably more aquatic insects and other prey. Nesting occurs in June, and females lay between 12-29 elongate eggs. Eggs hatch in 80-150 days. Hatchlings may overwinter in the nest.



Ornate Box Turtle ©J. Daren Riedle

Ornate Box Turtle

(Terrapene ornata)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 6 inches.

Description: Box Turtles derive their name from the movable hinge on the plastron that allows them to close up and completely protect their head and limbs. The Ornate Box Turtle has distinct yellow lines radiating along the scutes of both the carapace and plastron.

Habits: The Ornate Box Turtle is a terrestrial species occurring primarily in open grasslands, but may also be found in open woodlands. Ornate Box Turtles are primarily carnivorous, preying on insects, earthworms, and carrion. Will also eat berries and other fruit. Females lay a clutch of 2-8 eggs between May and June, and may occasionally lay a second clutch later in the summer. In 1986, the Ornate Box Turtle was recognized by the Kansas Legislature as the official state reptile of Kansas.

Three-toed Box Turtle ©J. Daren Riedle

male © Travis Taggart

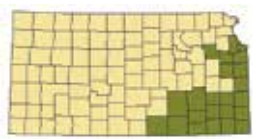
Three-toed Box Turtle

(Terrapene triunguis)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 7 inches.

Description: The Three-toed Box Turtle has a uniformly colored brown shell, with some specimens exhibiting light, radiating yellow lines. The plastron is patternless. The common name originates from the three toes in the hind foot of most individuals. Males of both Three-toed and Ornate Box Turtles have red eyes, while females are yellowish-brown.

Habits: The Three-toed Box Turtle is predominantly a woodland species restricted to eastern Kansas. Individuals have been spread westward due to their popularity as pets. Activity is driven by humidity, with most movement occurring after rainfalls. Although primarily terrestrial, Three-toed Box Turtles can occasionally be found soaking in shallow pools. They have also been observed swimming across rivers and reservoirs. Three-toed Box Turtles are omnivorous, eating mushrooms, berries, insects and other invertebrates.



Pond Slider ©J. Daren Riedle

Pond Slider

(Trachemys scripta)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 11 inches.

Description: Carapace is green to almost black with a pattern of yellow and dark lines. The rear edge of the carapace is jagged. The plastron is yellow with dark spots. A broad red stripe is present behind each eye. Adults, particularly males, may darken with age, turning almost completely black.

Habits: Pond Sliders occur in almost every type of permanent water in the state. They can also make significant overland movements between water bodies. They are omnivorous and opportunistic, consuming a wide variety of plant and animal matter. Females may nest throughout the summer months, laying up to 22 eggs. Young turtles hatch in 60-90 days.

Yellow Mud Turtle *©J. Daren Riedle*

Yellow Mud Turtle

(Kinosternon flavescens)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 6 inches.

Description: A small semi-aquatic turtle with a light brown shell. The bottom shell has two moveable hinges. Head and limbs are grayish, but the chin is typically yellow. The tail ends in a horny, clawlike tip and is much bigger in males.

Habits: Occur in a wide variety of aquatic habitats, including ponds, sloughs, ditches, windmill overflow ponds, wetlands and playas. They consume a wide variety of food items including aquatic vegetation, insects, amphibians, and carrion. Yellow Mud Turtles are capable of aestivation (summer hibernation) during hot dry periods when water bodies may dry up. They do so by burrowing underground. Females may lay clutches of up to 7 eggs in these burrows. They may be noticed crossing roads as they move from one water body to another.

Eastern Musk Turtle *©J. Daren Riedle*

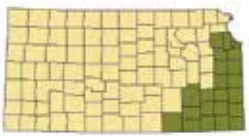
Eastern Musk Turtle

(Sternotherus odoratus)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 5 inches.

Description: A small aquatic-turtle with a dark brown or black carapace, and a reduced, yellowish colored plastron. Skin color is dark, and a pair of yellow stripes are present on each side of the head. Two small barbels are present on the chin.

Habits: Eastern Musk Turtles are a generalist species occurring in a wide range of aquatic habitats in eastern Kansas. They have an omnivorous diet consuming aquatic vegetation, insects, earthworms, snails, crayfish, carrion, and garbage. They are capable climbers, sometimes basking in trees as high as six feet above the water. The species name originates from its ability to excrete a foul-smelling musk when alarmed.



Smooth Softshell ©Suzanne Collins

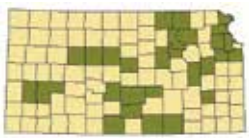
Smooth Softshell

(Apalone mutica)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 11 inches.

Description: Softshell turtles are characterized by flat, flexible carapaces, and plastrons that are much smaller than the carapace. Smooth Softshells lack fleshy bumps or tubercles along the front edge of the carapace. Limbs are typically uniform brown in color, and a yellow or white line extends through the eye on each side of the head. Males have much longer heads.

Habits: Smooth Softshells prefer moving water, rarely leaving except to bask or nest. Nesting typically peaks in May to June and females will deposit clutches of 3-25 eggs. Eggs typically hatch in 2 to 2 ½ months. Smooth Softshells are primarily carnivorous. Males may consume more terrestrial prey than females. The two sexes exhibit some differentiation of habitat, with males occurring more often in shallow water along shorelines, while females prefer deeper water.



Spiny Softshell *©Suzanne Collins*

Spiny Softshell

(Apalone spinifera)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 20 inches.

Description: The Spiny Softshell has a soft flexible carapace, with a much reduced plastron. There are small bumps or tubercles along the front edge of the carapace, which differentiates it from the Smooth Softshells. The carapace is patterned with spots or blotches. The limbs are patterned with dark streaks and spots, and a yellow line extends through the eye on each side of the head.

Habits: Spiny Softshells occur in a wide variety of aquatic habitats. They are predominantly carnivorous, eating a wide variety of prey including insects, amphibians, crayfish, tadpoles and frogs. Both species of softshell turtle in Kansas are capable of remaining submerged for long periods of time due to the ability to remove oxygen from the water through membranes in the mouth.

Slender Glass Lizard ©Suzanne Collins

Slender Glass Lizard

(Ophisaurus attenuatus)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 34 inches.

Description: The longest lizard in Kansas. No other limbless reptile in Kansas has eyelids or external ear openings. They are gray to coppery brown with two dark brown stripes running from the neck to the tip of the tail, which are bordered by narrower cream-colored stripes. Older individuals lose the stripes and develop a black and white spotted pattern (especially along the sides) and occasionally light bars across the back. The belly is cream colored.

Habits: Only the first few inches of this lizard is body, the rest is tail. Called the 'glass lizard' because the tail will dismember easily and continue to writhe after coming off, confusing any predator that has ended up with this part of the animal. Diurnal, they eat invertebrates and small lizards. Birds and mammals are their main predators.

Eastern Collared Lizard ©Travis Taggart

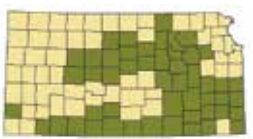
Eastern Collared Lizard

(Crotaphytus collaris)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 11 inches.

Description: This large lizard gets its name from the two black 'collars' around its neck. Its head is much larger in proportion to its neck than most other Kansas lizards. The coloration varies based on gender, age, season, and temperature. Adult males are gray to green from the collar to the tip of the tail, with numerous scattered white dots on the back. There may be narrow bars of white, gray, or yellow across the back, and in the spring the head becomes much more yellow. The females are gray to tan and also speckled with whitish spots, which often form irregular bars across the back. Gravid females develop orange bars along the sides, neck, and forearms. The bellies of both sexes are unspotted. Juveniles are more banded, but otherwise resemble small females.

Habits: Collared Lizards like rocky areas and are territorial. They will perch on their rock looking for any movement. If it's a predator, they scurry into their burrow under the rock. If it's prey, they will run it down and eat it. They consume anything moving that fits in their mouths including invertebrates, small mammals, and other reptiles.



Mediterranean House Gecko *©Travis Taggart*

Mediterranean House Gecko

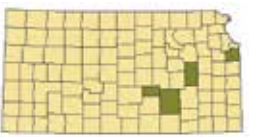
(Hemidactylus turcicus)

Introduced Species in Kansas

Size: Length in Kansas up to 5.5 inches.

Description: Unlike our native Kansas lizards, Mediterranean House Geckos have sticky toe pads, vertical pupils, and lack eyelids. Their ground color is light gray to tan and their skin is bumpy. Their head, back and legs are irregularly covered with small cream to dark brown spots. The spots may form bands across the back. The tail is has several dark brown bands that become more distinct toward the tip. The belly is translucent and unmarked.

Habits: Almost completely nocturnal. Their toe pads allow them to climb walls, where they often perch around outside lights. There they wait to grab small invertebrates. They hide in crevices or behind shutters, moldings, and lights during the day. Females lay several clutches of two white spherical eggs throughout the summer. Currently known only from commercial buildings (most often hotels) in El Dorado, Emporia, Lenexa, and Newton in Kansas, but they are undoubtedly more widespread.



Western Green Lacerta *©Suzanne Collins*

Western Green Lacerta

(Lacerta bilineata)

Introduced Species in Kansas

Size: Length in Kansas up to 12 inches.

Description: Highly variable in coloration and pattern. Males are typically bright green with black speckling on the back and light spots on the head and a blue throat. Females are brown to green and may have blotches on the back, or may have up to four narrow light lines along the sides of their body. Juveniles start off uniformly brown with a few light spots or lines along the body and gradually reach adult coloration.

Habits: Native to western and central Europe, this large lizard has been established in a small area of Topeka since at least 1973. It prefers areas of heavier vegetation, with plenty of exposed basking sites. They primarily eat invertebrates, but larger individuals may take fruit and even hatchling birds.

Italian Wall Lizard *©Suzanne Collins*

Italian Wall Lizard

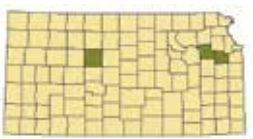
(Podarcis siculus)

Introduced Species in Kansas

Size: Length in Kansas up to 8 inches.

Description: Pattern and coloration is highly variable among individuals depending on their sex, age, and breeding condition. The ground color may be tan, brown or green along the back and often contrasts with the coloration of the side. There are generally two poorly-defined light stripes along each side of the back, and a darker irregular stripe down the back. The back and sides may be profusely mottled with small brown to black botches. The back scales are small and granular while the belly scales are larger rectangular plates. In the spring males may have a reddish tinge under their jaw, throat, cheek, and front legs.

Habits: The Italian Wall Lizard is native to the coasts of the Mediterranean Sea, Red Sea, and Persian Gulf of Africa and Eurasia. It has been introduced into Topeka, Lawrence, and Hays in Kansas. They persist in urban areas where there are abundant places for them to hide. They are active on warm days from February through November, and eat a variety of invertebrate prey.



Common Lesser Earless Lizard ©Travis Taggart

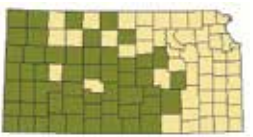
Common Lesser Earless Lizard

(Holbrookia maculata)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 5.5 inches.

Description: This small lizard lacks external ear openings, hence its name. They are gray, tan, or orange-brown with irregular, paired, dark blotches bordered with light cream-colored spotting. An indistinct lighter stripe often runs down the back from the head to the tip of the tail. The ground coloration often varies to better match the soil where the lizard lives. Some specimens (especially older females) lack markings and may be predominately tan or gray. There are two black bars along the lower side of the body just behind the front legs. Males may have a yellow tint on the lower sides, blue outlines around the side bars, copious light speckling, and less distinct dorsal blotches. Gravid females often have a pink or peach tint and an orange throat patch.

Habits: Most active during the day, but restricts its summer activity to the morning and late afternoon to avoid the heat. Retreats to burrows when the temperature is too cold. They feed on a variety of invertebrates and occasionally other small lizards.



Texas Horned Lizard *©Travis Taggart*

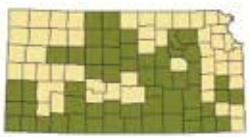
Texas Horned Lizard

(Phrynosoma cornutum)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 6 inches.

Description: The so-called "horny toad" is flat-bodied yet formidable looking. The head has numerous horns, with two central head spines (behind each eye) being much longer than any of the others. Gray to brown with irregular, paired, dark markings with light outlines on its back. A dark-bordered light line runs down the middle of the back from the neck onto the tail. The belly is cream-colored with numerous small dark brown spots.

Habits: This lizard is active by day and spends most of its time at ground level searching out small invertebrate prey (particularly Harvester Ants). It retreats to shade to escape the heat during mid-day and may burrow into loose soil at night. When a warm Texas Horned Lizard is picked up, it may emit a stream of blood from the back of the eyes. The significance of this behavior is poorly understood.



Prairie Lizard ©Suzanne Collins

Prairie Lizard

(Sceloporus consobrinus)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 7 inches.

Description: Two distinct patterns occur in Kansas. Those populations in southeast Kansas (south and east of Elk County) have a gray to brown background with dark brown zig-zag transverse bands down the back, with indistinct light striping down each side of the back. Elsewhere in Kansas, they are similarly patterned, however the light side stripes are much more distinct and there is a gray to light dull blue stripe down the center of the back. Males in both populations have blue scales along the sides of their belly and on their throat during the spring. Specimens from southeast populations grow to a larger size.

Habits: Commonly referred to as 'fence lizard', because they can often be seen perched atop wooden or stone fence posts as they bask and survey the area for predators and food. They are active by day and usually sleep close to their perch each night. They eat small invertebrates and in turn are preyed upon by mammals, birds, other reptiles, and a few larger invertebrates.

Coal Skink ©Suzanne Collins

Coal Skink

(Plestiodon anthracinus)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 7 inches.

Description: Coal Skinks have a shortened head and a streamlined body. The body is tan to dark brown, with a broad dark brown stripe on each side. Each stripe is bordered (above and below) by two cream-colored thin stripes. It resembles the Southern Prairie Skink (they both have the dark sides without dorsal stripes), but they do not share the same range in Kansas.

Habits: Coal skinks are seldom seen in Kansas and their habits are not well understood. They are most often encountered while foraging among fallen leaves or under cover adjacent to woodland streams. They do not climb while being pursued, but have been noted to enter water to avoid capture.

Common Five-lined Skink *©Suzanne Collins*

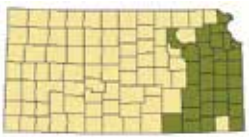
Common Five-lined Skink

(Plestiodon fasciatus)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 7 inches.

Description: The background color is gray, brown, or black with five cream-colored stripes running from the head to the tip of the tail. Adult males often lose the stripes, take on a light brown background and, in the spring, develop an orange coloration on the head. The juveniles are always striped and have a bright blue tail. This species closely resembles the Broad-headed Skink and can usually only be differentiated by examination of the head scales and comparing size.

Habits: They may be discovered out in the open while searching for small invertebrates to eat, but are most commonly encountered under rocks, logs, or trash. Like all other Kansas skinks (and several other lizards), their tails break off when restrained and then start twitching, which can distract a predator and allow the skink to get away.



Broad-headed Skink ©Suzanne Collins

Male ©J. Daren Riedle

Broad-headed Skink

(Plestiodon laticeps)

Threatened Species in Kansas

Size: Length in Kansas up to 12 inches.

Description: These large lizards are seldom seen in Kansas. They are easily confused with the Five-lined Skink, but are twice as large and have 5 scales on the upper lip between the nose and eye (instead of 4). The body is generally gray to dark brown, with five cream-colored stripes on the back and sides. Adults are often uniform gray to brown. Males develop enlarged orange heads in the spring. The young have bright blue tails and prominent stripes on an almost black background.

Habits: They spend much more time in trees (especially as adults) than other Kansas skinks. Males can be observed high up in trees basking and defending their territory. Younger individuals are most often observed on fallen trees along the woodland edge. They are occasionally discovered under flat rocks and trash.

Great Plains Skink *©J. Daren Riedle*

Great Plains Skink

(Plestiodon obsoletus)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 13 inches.

Description: This is the largest skink in Kansas but, unlike other Kansas skinks, the Great Plains Skink is not striped. They are strong, stocky, muscular lizards. Entire body is covered by tan to brown scales that are variably edged with dark brown to black, creating a mottled pattern. During the spring the males may have orange patches on the sides of their head, and their heads may be slightly swollen. Juveniles are black with a bright blue tail and white spots on the head.

Habits: They inhabit grassland and woodland edge, where they stay close to their burrows while hunting. Due to their larger size, they have more prey options than most other skinks. They will feed on any organism they can catch and swallow. They are harmless, but capable of delivering a pinching bite.

Southern Prairie Skink ©J. Daren Riedle

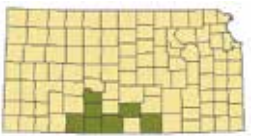
Southern Prairie Skink

(Plestiodon obtusirostris)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 8 inches.

Description: The background color is tan to coppery brown and occasionally there are some indistinct brown stripes down the back. A broad dark brown stripe that contains two thin whitish stripes just inside its margins runs along the sides from the ear openings to just behind the rear legs. Juveniles are darker than the adults and have bright blue tails. Males develop reddish cheeks during the spring breeding season.

Habits: Secretive and seldom seen. They search for small invertebrate prey by day through the grassland thatch, and are quick to flee when threatened. The females lay eggs in the late spring and, like most other skinks, stay with them until they hatch in the late summer.



Northern Prairie Skink *©Dan Fogell*

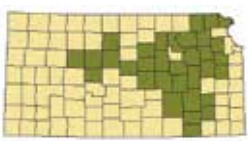
Northern Prairie Skink

(Plestiodon septentrionalis)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 9 inches.

Description: The background color is cream to tan to dark brown with four dark brown stripes from the neck onto the tail. A slightly thicker dark brown stripe, bordered above and below by white, runs along the side from the neck to past the hind legs. The unspotted belly may be a cream, yellow, or bluish color. Chin, throat, soles of the feet and sometimes a chest patch tend to be yellowish to pale yellow. Juveniles have darker bodies and a bright blue tail.

Habits: This lizard is more common in grassland areas with sandy soils, where they dig burrows for nesting and to avoid temperature extremes. They may be found under cover objects including flat rocks, fallen trees, and trash. During the day they actively search for small invertebrates to eat.



Little Brown Skink *©J. Daren Riedle*

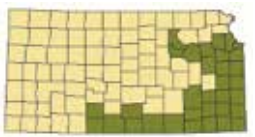
Little Brown Skink

(Scincella lateralis)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 5.5 inches.

Description: This small, slender lizard has a long tail and short legs. The background color ranges from tan to a golden or coppery brown on the head, body and tail. They have a darker stripe along each side of the body. The belly is uniform cream to yellow.

Habits: Most often heard as it scurries among leaf litter, well before it's ever seen. They hang out on the forest floor and, unlike other Kansas skinks, seldom climb to search for their invertebrate food or escape predators. Instead, they use their small legs and long body to quickly 'swim' through leaf litter, thatch, and loose soil. They are harmless, and attempts to catch them often leave the collector with a wiggling piece of tail in a handful of leaves.



Six-lined Racerunner *©Travis Taggart*

Six-lined Racerunner

(Aspidoscelis sexlineata)

Size: Length in Kansas up to 9.5 inches.

Description: This colorful lizard has light yellow to green stripes running from the neck onto the tail. The background color is tan to dark brown on the back and becomes bright green along the sides, especially in warm adult males, which often also have bright, light blue on the jaws and extending onto the throat and belly. The scales on the back are small and granular and become much larger and rectangular across the normally cream-colored belly.

Habits: By the heat of the day they are out actively searching for invertebrates to eat. As their name implies, they are quick, and are usually just a blur when you encounter them. These lizards are easiest to observe under cover on cool mornings. They are most common in areas with sandy soils.

A word about names

Some words commonly used for animals can be confusing and do not necessarily correspond with the categories of creatures as understood by scientists. 'Frog' and 'toad' cause some confusion when discussing amphibians. 'Turtle', 'tortoise', and 'terrapin' create similar issues with reptiles.

Frogs and Toads

The term 'frog' is the English name used for members of the Order Anura, the group of animals including all species of amphibians (and their common ancestor) generally characterized as having hind legs specialized for hopping and no tail. True Toads (family Bufonidae), Narrow-mouthed Toads (family Microhylidae), True Frogs (family Ranidae), Tree/Chorusfrogs (family Hylidae), and Spadefoots (family Scaphiopodidae) are all Frogs. That 'toads' are dry, 'warty', and poor jumpers, while 'frogs' are wet, slimy, and great leapers is a not true in every instance. For example, the Western Narrow-mouthed Toad is wet, Blanchard's Cricket Frog is both 'warty' and slimy, and the Crawfish Frog is a relatively poor jumper. Simply put, all toads are frogs, but not all frogs are toads!

Boreal Chorus Frog

©Travis Taggart

Turtles, Tortoises, and Terrapins

As with the anurans, there is some confusion in turtle terminology. But, in short, all tortoises are turtles, but not all turtles are tortoises. Tortoises are land dwelling turtles within the family Testudinidae characterized by large elephantine legs and web-less feet. Turtles are classified across multiple families and are typically aquatic, or at least semi-aquatic. There are no true tortoises in Kansas, but the two species of box turtles found in Kansas blur the line between turtles and tortoises. Box turtles are in the same family as the aquatic Painted Turtle and Pond Slider (Family Emydidae), but exhibit tortoise like characteristics that enable them to lead a primarily terrestrial lifestyle. Terrapin is a regionally colloquial term that is occasionally applied to box turtles or certain species that occur in brackish water.

Pond Slider *©Suzanne Collins*

References

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Amphibians, Reptiles, and Turtles in Kansas. By Joseph T. Collins, Suzanne L. Collins, and Travis W. Taggart, Eagle Mountain Publishing, Utah

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Herpetology Resources

- The Center for North American Herpetology (cnah.org)
- Kansas Herpetological Society (cnah.org/khs)

Acknowledgements

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First Edition
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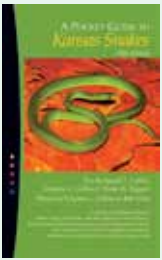
Pocket Guides

Jim Mason, Editor



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Great Plains Nature Center

The Great Plains Nature Center is a cooperative project between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism, and the City of Wichita Department of Park and Recreation. The GPNC features the Koch Habitat Hall, Owl's Nest gift shop, Coleman Auditorium, and 2 miles of Chisholm Creek Park nature trails. The Friends of the Great Plains Nature Center was formed to increase awareness of and help sustain the Center's environmental education mission. For more information visit the Great Plains Nature Center web site at gpnc.org. Please visit or contact us at Great Plains Nature Center, 6232 East 29th Street North, Wichita, KS 67220 or phone us at 316-683-5499

Westar Energy Green Team

Westar Energy, Inc. is the largest utility in Kansas serving nearly 700,000 customers with about 35,000 miles of transmission and distribution lines. Since 1989, their employees have operated an environmental team. The Green Team members volunteer hours to improve wildlife habitat through wetland creation and restoration and native grass and tree planting. They build bridges and trails and work to protect and reintroduce sensitive plant and animal species. The Green Team can be contacted at 785-575- 8125 or at Ben.Postlethwait@Westarenergy.com.

Chickadee Checkoff

The Chickadee Checkoff program is a voluntary donation program for nongame projects sponsored by the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism. Kansas taxpayers are able to contribute on their individual state income tax form. Donations can also be made by sending a check to Chickadee Checkoff Program, 512 SE 25th Ave., Pratt, KS 67124. Since 1980, the Chickadee Checkoff program has distributed over $4 million to projects that help endangered species, assist in reintroduction efforts of sensitive species, supports wildlife education projects at schools and nature centers, and supports hundreds of other nongame conservation projects.

Center for North American Herpetology

The Center for North American Herpetology (CNAH) was established to benefit the North American herpetofauna and the scientists that study them. CNAH serves as a data bank for information about North American amphibians and reptiles and promotes research on them by financial support of selected publications, photography, and any other appropriate medium, as well as the establishment of awards for excellence in research about these fascinating creatures. – cnah.org

Kansas Herpetological Society

The KHS is a non-profit organization designed to encourage scholarship, reasearch, and dissemination of scientific information through the acilities of the Society; to encourage conservation of wildlife in general and of the herpetofauna of Kansas in particular; and to achieve closer cooperation and understanding between herpetologists, so that they may work together in common cause. – cnah.org/khs

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