

*Cistoclemmys galbinifrons* \*- The Flowerback Box Turtle - Sharon Chancellor  
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*Cistoclemmys galbinifrons galbinifrons*

*Cistoclemmys galbinifrons bourreti*

*Cistoclemmys galbinifrons picturata*

Synonyms - Indo-Chinese Box Turtle, Vietnamese Box Turtle

\*Was known until recently as *Cuora galbinifrons*



Wild populations of *Cistoclemmys galbinifrons* are under tremendous pressure from the Asian food market trade. While the entire genus of *Cistoclemmys* is CITES II listed, this has done little to protect them in their natural range. If you do acquire a Flowerback box turtle, please be aware that because of collection and shipping stresses that they will require specialized care. They do not make good pets for young children or beginner keepers. If at all possible try to obtain long-term captive *Cistoclemmys galbinifrons*. These will generally be healthier and much

better adapted to captivity than freshly imported turtles. Remember these are very long-lived animals and as the owner your commitment to them may be measured in many years.

**Housing** - The best habitat for Flowerback Box Turtles is a large outdoor enclosure, bounded by siding, wood, bricks or cement blocks at least 18 inches high with an wide over hanging ledge to prevent climbing out. Please be aware that this species is an excellent climber. The pen must provide a variety of environments including sunny and shaded areas as well as places to hide. In addition portions of the habitat must easily be kept in a very humid state. Turtles regulate their core body temperature by behavior and need to have a choice between sun and shade. A pile of leaves and dense shrubbery provides an ideal hiding/shady place as well as a more humid area to retreat to. Being outdoors allows the turtle to supplement what you feed it with snails, slugs, earthworms, and other invertebrates as they forage.

### *Cuora galbinifrons* - Flowerback Box Turtle

- **Location** - Vietnam, Guangxi China, Hainan Island
- **Habitat** - Semi-terrestrial - Damp woodlands and wetlands
- **Size** - 20 cm ( 8 inches)
- **Diet** - omnivorous - fruits, vegetables, greens, insects, earthworms and slugs
- **Conservation Status** - CITES II designation
- **Threats** - habitat loss, food markets
- **Alternate Names** - Indochinese Box Turtle



Flowerback Box turtles are in the same subfamily (*Batagurinae*) as many highly aquatic Asian species such as *Chinemys kwanlungensis*, *Batagur baska* and *Cistoclemmys amboinensis* and as such, although not fully aquatic, do enjoy an occasional swim. A shallow pan, perhaps as deep as the turtle's carapace is high, should be sunk into the ground and kept filled with fresh water. Make certain to arrange for easy access and egress of the water dish as they can possibly drown if trapped in water of too great a depth. Fresh drinking water must be provided daily. This species also appreciates over-head misting and watering and will more readily drink from "rain" than from a water bowl.

*Cistoclemmys galbinifrons* does not hibernate; therefore in areas that are not suitable for year round outdoor keeping a large indoor enclosure can serve as housing for them. Adults require an indoor enclosure with high sides, as they are excellent climbers. Horse water troughs and very large plastic storage bins make excellent winter housing for an adult. Plastic children's pools, sandboxes or concrete mixing tubs can make inexpensive habitats for juveniles. Flowerback Box turtles are shy and reclusive, direct lighting will stress this species. Full spectrum fluorescent lighting such as a Vita-Light™ is required, if animals are maintained indoors year around, but should be kept at one end of the enclosure so the turtle is not exposed to direct bright light all day. A clamp-on 60 - 100 watt fixture equipped with a ceramic heat emitter and reflector can be used to maintain the necessary temperatures of 85 F during the day and no less than 65 F during the night. Absorbent flooring material such as clean topsoil, leaves, moss or cypress mulch should be provided, changed regularly, and should be deep enough for burrowing. Substrates that dry out or get powdery should be avoided. Cedar and pine chips can be poisonous and should not be utilized. Do not place the turtle's home near air-conditioning vents or drafts as this could lead to a respiratory illness or general stress.

**Feeding** - Flowerback Box turtles can be fed a diet that is 50% mixed fresh vegetables with some fruit, and 50% low fat protein like canned low fat dog food. Ideally the protein should be whole live foods like earthworms, mealworms, beetles, grubs, crickets, slugs and snails. New acquisitions will often start feeding on live prey and then can be gradually coaxed to accept different things. Variety is the key to a healthy appetite and good health. Try apples, peaches, strawberries, cantaloupe, bananas, grapes, tomatoes, endive, romaine lettuce, summer squash, sweet potatoes, and lean chopped meats. Prepared turtle foods such as Mazuri tortoise chow can be used, and should be soaked and mixed with a generous amount of vegetable matter. Catfish chow, and trout chow should be used sparingly and should be soaked in order to soften them. Turtles should be given a vitamin/mineral supplement to insure proper bone and shell growth. To prevent ingestion of the flooring material all food should be placed on a plate or flat rock.

**Health** - When properly acclimated, Flowerback box turtles are hardy. Due to the stress of the Asian food trade and the exposure to a myriad of potential pathogens, veterinary care is a must with fresh imports. Freshly imported turtles are often dehydrated, anorexic, suffering from heavy parasite loads and may harbor internal bacterial infections. Many adult females freshly imported are gravid. Addressing these health issues immediately will help increase the odds of successful acclimation. Observe your turtle frequently and take care of the small problems before they get become serious problems. With care your Flowerback Box turtle will survive many years.

It should be noted that turtle and tortoise care research is ongoing. As new information becomes available we share this on the World Chelonian Trust web site at [www.chelonia.org](http://www.chelonia.org). Serious keepers find it to be a benefit to have the support of others who keep these species. Care is discussed in our free online email community, which may be joined from the web address above. Please contact us about the many benefits of becoming a member of the World Chelonian Trust.

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