THAMNOPHIS SIRTALIS (Common Garter Snake). DIET. On 18 May 2002, we captured a Common Garter Snake crossing a gravel road on Quivira National Wildlife Refuge (Kansas: Stafford Co: 38°07'30"N, 98°30'00"W). The snake (ca. 30 cm SVL) had a small (ca. 3 cm total length) desiccated earthworm oriented sideways in its mouth, and it was actively chewing on the worm. The worm was completely dehydrated and not pliable. The snake was released soon after capture.

Although this species is known to consume carrion (Gray 2002, Herpetological Review 33: 142–143; Sajdak and Sajdak 1999, Herpetological Review 30: 229; Conant and Collins 1998, Peterson Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of Eastern and Central North America. Third Edition Expanded. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston. xviii + 616 pp.), only vertebrate carrion has been mentioned in the literature. Thus, we believe that our observation expands the notion of what is a suitable food item for these snakes. In many habitats, dehydrated invertebrates could serve as an abundant food source for animals willing to consume them.

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CHELYDRA SERPENTINA (Common Snapping Turtle) MATING BEHAVIOR. At 11:30 am (CDST) on the morning of 25 May 2004 at the Nelson Environmental Study Area eight miles N of Lawrence (Douglas County, Kansas), Galen Pittman and I observed two Common Snapping Turtles (Chelydra serpentina) in the SE corner of Pond 436, one of 28 ponds measuring 10 meters square within a fenced enclosure. Sky was overcast; air 73°F (Cooper Instrument Company SH66A digital thermometer); water 26.6°C (same instrument).

The observation was brief. The turtles seemed to be mating, but were doing so plastron to plastron. One (the male) had a carapace ca. 8 inches long, the other (which appeared to be a female) had a carapace ca. 12 inches long. The male’s legs were outspread so as to facilitate his grasping the axial/inguinal areas of the larger turtle with his claws.

Ernst, Lovich, and Barbour (1994 Turtles of the United States and Canada) and most other references state that the males mount from above. This means the tail can be curled under the female’s tail and the penis, though short in turtles, usually spade shaped, can reach under the female’s tail. However, it must be noted that all of the published references I and others have noted to date have involved matings on land where the male mounting dorsally would, from a biomechanical standpoint, be the most practical behavior. In a water environment, a dorsal mount would present problems for successful mating should the female move off, whereas the behavior noted here would result in a far more hydrodynamic “package” of the two animals. This would especially be of advantage where the male is of noticeably smaller body size than the female.

I am not familiar with turtle behavior, but see no reason why they, in water, would not mate thus. But I have never seen any mention of this behavior. I would welcome comments from individuals with similar observations, and am grateful to Marty Capron (pers. comm.) for sharing a similar observation noted in a filmed sequence of sea turtle (no genus recalled) mating. I also am grateful to Dale Belcher, Reptile Curator, Rio Grande Zoo (Albuquerque, New Mexico) for relating an anecdotal reference to similar behavior (one mating observation out of over a hundred recalled). Thanks also are expressed to Harold Dundee (Tulane University Museum of Zoology) for pointing out the Ernst et al. reference.

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