

**A Surprising Observation of Spiny Softshell
Climbing Ability**

A large, wild-caught (33 cm x 23 cm carapace) Spiny Softshell (*Apalone spinifera*) demonstrated surprising climbing ability for the species. The turtle was rescued from a Denver bike trail adjacent to a drained pond in which it probably resided. It was being held

indoors in a cardboard box for later release when it escaped from its container. The turtle's route followed the periphery of 3 rooms on the main floor of a two story house, and was easily identified by displaced objects and overturned plants. This route passed by the base of the stairs to the upper floor of the house. At this point, the turtle could have continued following the perimeter of the floor, but instead it climbed 14 stairs 18-19 cm each in height. Reports are rare in the literature on the climbing ability of this species. Cox (1894. The climbing habits of the soft shell turtle (*Aspidochelys spinifer*). Science. 23: 50.) observed that climbing was extremely difficult for this species, with a 10 cm step proving too great of an obstacle. Thus, a series of 14 steps nearly twice as tall would seem insurmountable and it is difficult to understand why the turtle would deviate from its path along the perimeter of the floor to climb a series of stairs.

The turtle was found in an upstairs room (of four available) that contained an aerated aquarium holding a bluegill (*Lepomis macrochirus*) and a crayfish (*Orconectes virilis*). That the turtle was able to identify the stairs as a pathway was also surprising, given its route along the floor perimeter and the geometry of its line of vision. This presents the possibility that the turtle's choice of the much more difficult route up the stairs may have been a response (perhaps olfactory) to locating water (aquarium) or locating the crayfish and the fish in the aquarium, as they constitute major food items in the species' diet (Hammerson, 1999. Amphibians and Reptiles in Colorado. Second Edition. University Press of Colorado, Niwot, Colorado. 484 pp.).

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