

Turtle Titan

Background on Izzy—The Bayou Behemoth

In late spring 1962, a professional wildlife collector captured a huge male alligator snapping turtle in the Bonnet Carré Spillway, St. Charles Parish, Louisiana. Because of the turtle's unusually large size, the collector realized he could fetch a better price for the animal alive than as an ingredient in soup, so he sold him to C.C. McClung, who operated the Snake Farm in nearby La Place. A colorful individual in his own right, McClung called Max Allen's Zoological Gardens near Eldon, Missouri, which purchased the turtle.

After arriving at its new home in the Ozarks, the bayou behemoth was placed in an indoor pool with windows. The turtle amazed visitors with its size, but it refused to eat, despite being offered the usual and even novel food items. This went on for ten months. Then one evening, the zoo curator placed a large common snapping turtle

that someone had donated in the alligator snapper's pool for the night.

The next morning, when the zoo staff arrived, they found that the water in the pool was scarlet. Believing that the giant alligator snapper had died, they drained the pool, only to find the alligator snapper alive but the common snapper missing its head and two legs. From that day forward, the alligator snapping turtle ate whatever he was given.

The turtle lived at Max Allen's until 1986, when he was donated to the St. Louis Zoo. Ultimately, Bronx Zoo Herpetology Curator John Behler convinced St. Louis to send the aging chelonian to New York. There, in 1991, he was given a name—Izzy A. Live—by the winner of a visitor naming contest. Today, Izzy tips the scales at whopping 197 pounds and measures 29 1/2 inches in length.

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