

Eastern Mud Turtle (*Kinosternon subrubrum subrubrum*)

Pennsylvania Turtle Species of Concern

State Rank: S1 (Critically Imperiled) Global Rank: G5 (Secure)

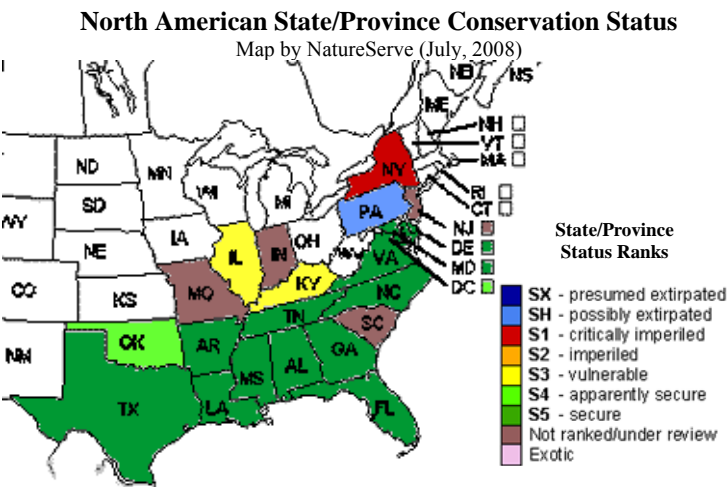
Identification

The Eastern Mud Turtle is one of North America’s smallest turtles, rarely exceeding 95mm (approximately 4”) in length. The unpatterned shell of the Eastern Mud Turtle may vary from light brown, to olive, to nearly black. The plastron, or undershell, is usually yellowish with hints of brown. This is the only species in the Commonwealth that has two hinges on the plastron, which can be drawn upward to conceal its head and appendages from predators. The tail of the Eastern Mud Turtle is greatly developed, especially in males, and is tipped by a sharp “nail”. The chin and neck of the species may be striped and stippled with yellow. The Eastern Mud Turtle may easily be confused with the much more common Eastern Musk Turtle, also known as the Stinkpot Turtle (*Sternotherus odoratus*). These species are most easily distinguished from the size and shape of the plate-like scutes on the plastron.



Eastern Mud Turtle (*Kinosternon subrubrum subrubrum*)

photo source: Charlie Eichelberger



Range

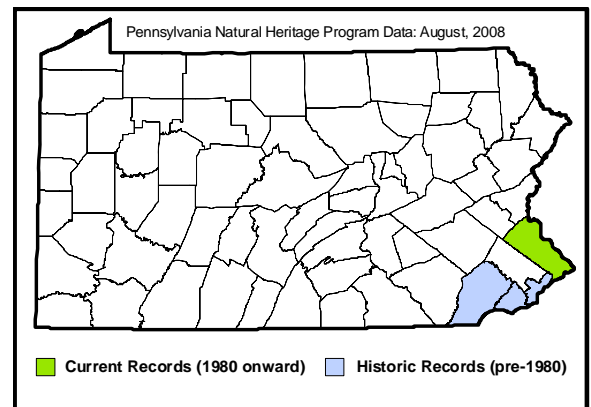
Eastern Mud Turtles are found along the Coastal regions of New York State, southward to Florida, along the Gulf Coast states and north along the Mississippi River drainage to Illinois and Indiana. In Pennsylvania, the species is confined to the coastal plain, and has been known from Delaware, Bucks, Montgomery, and Philadelphia Counties. Today, only two extant populations are known from the Commonwealth. Years have gone between sightings of this species in the state, and it has never been common in Pennsylvania. The recent “rediscovery” of the Eastern Mud Turtle in the state has led the Pennsylvania Biological Survey to move the status from “historic” to “critically imperiled”.

Habitat

Eastern Mud Turtles are primarily an aquatic species, though overland travel for males is quite common during the late spring. The aquatic habitats used by this turtle are mixed, from shallow ephemeral depressions that may only be wet for a few days following a rain event, or wetlands over a meter (approximately 3’) deep. Eastern Mud Turtle wetlands are typified by soft muddy bottoms, and abundant vegetation. Both fresh and brackish waters may be inhabited by the Eastern Mud Turtle. Though the turtle may exist in high densities in certain parts of the range, it is largely secretive, and usually only encountered if specifically searching for it.

Conservation Status

Unfortunately, the Eastern Mud Turtles range in Pennsylvania overlaps those areas which have been drastically altered by development, and encroachment on the remaining habitat for this species continues. Pockets of habitat still exist in the Commonwealth on both private and public lands, and these remaining wetlands may be extensive enough to keep this rare turtle as a member of Pennsylvania’s herpetofauna. Due to its secretive nature, intensive surveys for this species are needed to adequately establish its status in the remaining patches of habitat.



References

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