

Information excerpted from Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries Wildlife Species Booklets. Many photos are from the Virginia Herpetological Society's turtle species webpage.

### **Eastern mud turtle (*Kinosternon subrubrum subrubrum*)**



### **Characteristics**

This is a small, flattened, oval turtle whose back edge is nearly perpendicular. The head is large and irregularly streaked, spotted, or marbled with light colors. The plastron (lower shell) is relatively large with 2 obvious hinges (hinges are not developed in young). The carapace (upper shell) length is from 3-5 inches long, smooth and light brown to almost black in color. In the young turtle, the carapace is rougher and black or very dark brown, and each marginal scale bears a light spot. The male has a longer tail with prominent claw at the tip and two small horny patches on the inner surface of each hind leg. The eggs are white, oval, variable in size, and have a thick, hard, and brittle shell. The shell surface is covered with fine irregular network of impressed lines. The eggs do not take up water as most turtle eggs do. The breeding season is April to May, and egg laying starts soon thereafter. The clutch size is 2 to 5 eggs. This is a bottom crawler but is also a good swimmer.

### **Distribution**

This turtle is found in a variety of aquatic habitats, including ponds, lakes, creeks, swamps, freshwater and brackish marshes, ditches, and boggy areas. It prefers shallow, slow water areas with submergent and emergent vegetation that has a soft organic bottom. This turtle overwinters on land in a burrow in soft substrate, such as an existing muskrat burrow.

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### **Eastern snapping turtle (*Chelydra serpentina serpentina*)**



### **Characteristics**

This turtle has a flattened carapace (upper shell) with knobby keels that smooth out with age. It can grow very large, reaching up to 19 inches in length and weighing from 10 to 35 pounds. It has a large head, a small plastron (lower shell), and a long tail which is saw-toothed along the upper side. The carapace is brown; the plastron and bridge are cream to light brown with varying amounts of black on the surface. The skin of the head, neck, and limbs is dark brown or black, and the large head has a blunt, protruding snout. The carapace is often covered with algae. Juveniles are similar to adults in morphology and color. The breeding season is from late April until November. The incubation period is from 80-90 days, and egg laying occurs usually in June. The hard-shelled, white eggs are spherical in shape, resembling ping-pong balls. The eggs are laid in a flask-shaped cavity that the females dig in many varieties of soils on dry land.

### **Distribution**

The snapping turtle is found statewide, including on some barrier islands. It inhabits a wide variety of aquatic habitats, including ponds, lakes, streams, rivers, swamps, and freshwater and brackish marshes. Areas providing cover in the form of stumps, muskrat lodges and burrows, overhanging ledges, and /or soft, deep, organic substrate have the largest populations. The activity season extends from late March through October, but snapping turtles can be found in water in any month of the year.

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## **Eastern painted turtle (*Chrysemys picta picta*)**



### **Characteristics**

The painted turtle is the most common basking turtle observed in Virginia. This is a moderate-sized freshwater turtle that grows to a maximum carapace length of 7.2 inches. It has red markings on the marginal scutes and a notched upper jaw. The carapace is smooth, oval, and flattened, with the highest and widest points at the center. The back edge of the shell is not serrated. The carapace is olive to black with yellow or red borders along the seams and red bars or crescents on the marginals. Juveniles are patterned and colored as adults. The carapace is usually round for the first two years of life and elongation occurs thereafter. This species may be confused with other basking turtles when viewed from a distance. *Pseudemys rubriventris* and *P. concinna* lack the two yellow spots on the head, and are usually much larger, and have highly-domed shells compared to painted turtles. *T. scripta scripta* has distinct indentations along the posterior margin of the carapace and an elongated yellow bar on the side of the head. The introduced red-eared slider (*T. s. elegans*) has an elongated, reddish patch behind the eye. The painted turtle is most active between March and October, but it may be seen basking on warm winter days. It hibernates under logs or stumps underwater, or in muskrat or beaver lodges. Females nest on land, usually around April, and the eggs incubate for about 75 days.

### **Distribution**

The painted turtle occurs in a variety of aquatic habitats that have permanent, slow-moving water. It inhabits ponds, lakes, ditches, swamps, rivers, creeks and marshes. Preferred habitat has aquatic vegetation, soft substrate, and basking sites.

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## Spotted turtle (*Clemmys guttata*)



### Characteristics

This is a small freshwater turtle reaching a maximum carapace length of 5 inches. The carapace (upper shell) is black to blue-black with 3 to 92 yellow or cream-colored spots. The plastron (lower shell) is yellow, cream, or orangish with large black blotches. The skin on head, neck, and limbs is dark gray to black with a variable number of yellow spots on them; the undersides of the limbs are reddish to yellowish in color. Juveniles are colored and patterned as adults, but with one spot in most pleural and vertebral scutes. Older individuals usually have more spots than juveniles, and the carapace may be very worn, eroded, and spotless. The non-breeding territory for this species is 1.3 acres (.002 square miles). This species is active from spring thaw until June. Mating occurs in spring in shallow water. Two to seven eggs are laid in the late spring or summer. Basking occurs frequently, especially early in the activity season, on logs, stumps, grass mats, and tussocks. This turtle overwinters underwater in mud, under banks, or in muskrat burrows.

### Distribution

The spotted turtle is found east of the Blue Ridge Mountains, but is also found in Augusta and Page counties in the Shenandoah Valley. It inhabits a variety of shallow-water aquatic habitats, including ponds, streams, flooded fields, bogs, forested wetlands, and freshwater marshes, that have wooded areas nearby.

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## **Striped mud turtle (*Kinosternon baurii*)**



### **Characteristics**

The striped mud turtle is an olive brown turtle approximately 7-12 cm in length. Maximum known carapace (upper shell) length in VA is 123mm. The shell is nearly black with three light stripes though these may be obscure in most turtles in Virginia. Plastron (lower shell) is between 63-116mm in length and is olive to mahogany in color, sometimes with a darker outline around the scutes. Skin is dark with 2 distinct light-colored stripes on each side of the head, one above and one below the tympanum ("ear"). The lower beak is slightly curved. Females are slightly larger than males. Courtship and mating occurs in spring with nesting from July to early October. The female lays one to four eggs that hatch in three to four months. Striped mud turtles are active from March (late) through October in Virginia. They are aquatic turtles but spend a lot of time on land though they are not baskers. They forage by walking along the muddy bottom of the waterway looking for seeds from plants, insects, mollusks, and algae. They hibernate out of water buried under leaf litter in moist soil. They will try to bite when handled.

### **Distribution**

This turtle is found on the coastal plain of Virginia as far north as the Middle Peninsula.

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## Northern red-bellied cooter (*Pseudemys rubriventris*)



### Characteristics

This is a large freshwater turtle that grows to a carapace (upper shell) length of 15.7 inches. The shell is elongate, oval, usually flattened or mid-dorsally concave in old specimens, and often constricted in the region of the sixth marginal (the marginals are the scutes, or sections of the shell, that form the outer edge). The carapace is brownish with a reticulated pattern in the young, with the light markings often red, and the most frequently occurring red mark being the broader transverse line on each lateral which is longer than the other lines. There is a transverse light bar (usually red) on each of the upper marginals. The plastron (lower shell) is orange or red with a dark pattern along seams in the young, but which fades with age. The head is dark brown with light stripes; a prominent stripe on the top of the head joins the thin lines above the eyes at the snout to form the prefrontal arrow, characteristic of this turtle. The tip of the upper jaw is notched with a tooth-like cusp on either side. The eggs are laid in June and July in a cultivated tract or cornfield adjoining the water. If the banks are steep they will deposit the eggs on the shore. The nests may be more than 100 feet from the water .

### Distribution

This turtle is found throughout the Coastal Plain, in the Potomac River and Shenandoah River, and several areas in the Piedmont region. It is found on Assateague Island, but no other barrier islands. It inhabits lakes and ponds, as well as in clear, swift moving creeks and lower silt-bearing rivers, and into their brackish lower reaches and salt marshes. They sun on rocks in the water or on the shore. They live in comparatively deep water. Preferred habitat includes emergent and submerged freshwater plants, basking sites near deep water, and a soft substrate for overwintering.

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### **Yellow-bellied slider (*Trachemys scripta scripta*)**



### **Characteristics**

This is a large freshwater turtle reaching a maximum carapace length of 11.4 inches in the U.S. The carapace (upper shell) is oval, weakly keeled, and olive to brown with yellow markings. Old individuals may be completely black. The rear margin of the carapace is serrated. The plastron (lower shell) is yellow with black markings; usually there are two solid black spots on the rear plastron. There is a vertical yellow line behind the eye and stripes on the neck, arms, and legs. Eggs and nesting females have been found from May through July. There are usually from 10 to 12 eggs, although larger females may lay more. The newly-hatched young remain in the nest until heavy rains loosen the encrusted soil. Mating occurs in spring, fall, and winter months. The activity period is April through October. This turtle is frequently observed basking on banks or logs. These turtles overwinter in water in soft organic substrate, in muskrat burrows, and by simply sitting on the bottom.

### **Distribution**

*Trachemys scripta scripta* is found in southeastern Virginia in the lower York County-James City County peninsula and south of the James River from the Atlantic Coast westward into Lunenburg and Mecklenburg counties. It inhabits a wide variety of freshwater habitats in southeastern Virginia, from lakes and ponds, to rivers, ditches, marshes, bays, and swamps, and will sometimes enter brackish or salt water. It prefers sites that have an organic substrate, aquatic vegetation, and basking sites.