

Northern Map Turtle

Graptemys geographica



Status: **Special Concern**

Threats:

- ◆ Habitat decline due to shoreline development
- ◆ Loss of food source in lakes (decreased water quality, increased pollution, invasive species like zebra mussels)
- ◆ Pet trade



Photo: Leeanne Leduc



Photo: Scott Gillingwater

Description:

- ◆ Numerous fine yellow lines on an olive green to brownish carapace, resembling a map; may be less obvious in older turtles
- ◆ Rear margin of carapace serrated
- ◆ Carapace has a slight raised area (or keel) down centre of shell
- ◆ Yellow plastron
- ◆ Yellow spot, variable in size and shape, behind each eye
- ◆ Head and limbs may have light and dark stripes
- ◆ Females are much larger than males
- ◆ Carapace on females up to 25 cm long; males 14 cm

Biology:

- ◆ Very wary species and will dive underwater at the slightest provocation
- ◆ Mating occurs at hibernation site from October-April
- ◆ One of the only times they leave the water is when females lay their eggs in June or July
- ◆ Lays 10-16 oblong, parchment-shelled eggs in sandy soil
- ◆ Females have powerful jaws used for crushing molluscs

Habitat:

- ◆ Lives in large rivers and lakes
- ◆ Likes slow moving currents, muddy bottoms, and aquatic vegetation
- ◆ Needs a sunny spot to bask during the day
- ◆ Will congregate in favoured sites to bask and hibernate together, such as on the bottom of deep, slow-moving lakes & rivers

Species at Risk
STEWARDS' GUIDE SERIES

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*Turtle on the road?
Here's How
You Can Help:*

Northern Map Turtle on Your Property? *Here's What You Can Do:*

- ◆ Protect nest sites by observing from a distance. Nesting season in Ontario is in June and July; eggs hatch by the end of summer, although if summer weather is cold, hatchlings may overwinter in the nest.
- ◆ Don't cover turtle nests: they need specific temperatures if hatching is to be successful. Covering the nest could result in cooler temperatures and the eggs might not have time to hatch before the fall freeze.
- ◆ Improving your water quality improves habitat for turtles. Be sure your septic system is maintained. Avoid the use of pesticides and chemicals.
- ◆ Maintain a shoreline buffer. Stabilize your shoreline to avoid erosion.
- ◆ Maintain your wetland areas.
- ◆ Sit back, relax, and enjoy knowing you have provided suitable habitat for one of Ontario's precious turtles!
- ◆ **See a turtle?** Tell Turtle Tally! If you see a, at risk turtle (live or dead) submit your sighting to Ontario Turtle Tally: www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/TurtleTally.asp. You can also submit your sighting to the Natural Heritage Information Centre at nhic.mnr.gov.on.ca/MNR/nhic/species/species_report.cfm. Every turtle sighting you report helps protect Ontario's turtles and the places they live.
- ◆ **Learn more.** Check out the Species at Risk section on the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources website at www.mnr.gov.on.ca.



Male on top, female on bottom
Photo: Scott Gillingwater



Photo: Kenton Otterbein

- ◆ Watch for traffic! Make sure it is safe to pull over and help the turtle without putting yourself at risk.
- ◆ Move the turtle in the direction it's going. If you don't, it will probably turn around and try again.
- ◆ Don't lift a turtle by its tail. Turtles are heavy; you could dislocate vertebrae. Don't drag turtles - they get road rash!
- ◆ A turtle smaller than a dinner plate can be picked up by the shell. Grasp the shell on either side of the tail at 5 and 7 o'clock. If you have gloves, wear them.
- ◆ Larger turtles are more challenging. If possible, toss a towel or blanket over its head. Turtles that can't see you, can't bite you. The turtle can then be picked up in the same way as above.
- ◆ If you can't lift it and have a shovel handy, try gently sliding the shovel under the back end of the turtle. You can then either shovel the turtle onto a second blanket and drag it across the road or slowly push the turtle across the road on the shovel. If using a shovel to move a turtle, keep it very low to the ground in case the turtle moves.
- ◆ Most turtles will pee on you when handled. Hold them away from your body.
- ◆ It is best not to move a turtle from the general area where it is attempting to cross the road. Turtles do make overland movements away from wetlands; however, if the area is highly developed or the risk of the turtle moving onto another road is high, then moving the turtle to the nearest wetland is probably the best option.
- ◆ Wash your hands after handling a turtle.