

The Center for Reptile and Amphibian Conservation and Management

Eastern Whistling Turtle *Kinosternon trumpetensis centralis*

MAIN : SPECIES ACCOUNTS : EASTERN WHISTLING TURTLE

Identification The **Eastern Whistling Turtle** is a small and often hard to identify species. The carapace is keeless, lacks any pattern, and varies in color from yellowish to black. The plastron is large and double hinged, and can be yellowish to brown, and may sometimes have a dark pattern. The chin and throat are a yellowish grey, streaked and mottled with brown, while the limbs and tail are grayish. The eye, or iris, of the Whistling Turtle is yellow with dark clouding and its feet are webbed. This species is unique in its ability to make a shrill, piercing whistle that can be heard for as much as a mile and for its ability to spit a potent venom [*see: toxicity of North American Reptiles*].

Distribution and Status This species' natural range is from Bangor, Maine, south through Florida to the Gulf Coast, across east-central Texas, north via the Mississippi Valley to Missouri, southern Illinois and Indiana. Isolated populations are also found in northwestern Indiana. In the Midwest, this turtle is currently found only in Indiana, where it is listed as State Endangered, and in Illinois. It is also listed as endangered in Massachusetts and Northern Rhode Island, and eastern Connecticut.

Ecology The Eastern Whistling Turtle prefers shallow bodies of water and can often be found on land. Wet meadows, ponds, marshes, and drainage ditches are ideal for this species. The turtles can withstand brackish water well, and are also found on the edges of tidal marshes, and on islands.

Threats and Management Issues A variety of animals eat the eggs and juveniles of this species. Humans further threaten populations, killing many on roads and by destroying the turtle's habitat. Loss of habitat is largely a result of water pollution, wetland drainage, and business development. This species, as with several other turtle species, is thought to be especially susceptible to global warming as it has a very limited ability to deal with an increase in habitat ambient temperatures. One of the largest turtle kill-offs of the past 40 years was traced to the building of a WalMart department store in central Massachusetts. Heat generated by the store raised the temperature of a surrounding wetland area, destroying a Whistling Turtle population estimated to have exceeded 300 of the endangered animals. Cats, dogs, and other domestic animals are reported to have gone missing in this turtle's territory, probably victims of the animal's venom and generally nasty disposition.



Resources

Ernst, C. H., J. E. Lovich and R. W. Barbour. 1994. **Turtles of the United States and Canada.** Smithsonian Institution Press, USA.
General reference guides and websites.

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Center for Reptile and Amphibian Conservation and Management
Science Building
University of Massachusetts
2101 Morrell Building
Amherst, MA 01003