

eastern musk turtle *Sternotherus odoratus*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Testudines

Family: Kinosternidae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

The eastern musk turtle is also known as the stinkpot. This small turtle averages three and one-fourth to four and one-half inches in length. Its oval, high-domed shell may be covered with algae. The carapace (upper shell) is smooth and brown to black in color. The plastron (lower shell) has one hinge. Barbels (whiskerlike projections) are present on the chin and throat. Two light stripes are located on each side of the head. The male has a large, thick tail with a claw tip that is not present in the female.

BEHAVIORS

The eastern musk turtle may be found statewide in Illinois. It lives in the shallow, still water of rivers and small streams. This small reptile is aquatic, but it may be seen basking on logs or other objects along the water's edge. The common name "stinkpot" is due to the foul smelling musk this turtle may release from its scent glands when disturbed. It may climb fairly high into trees along the water's edge, if the trees are leaning over the water. The musk turtle is most active from before sunrise through early morning and again from late evening until shortly after dark. It buries itself in mud to overwinter. Courtship and mating occur from April through June. The female deposits four to five eggs in a nest dug in the soil. She may lay eggs up to three times per year. The eggs hatch in early fall. This turtle eats arthropods (insects, spiders and others), fishes, worms, algae, dead animals and mollusks (snails, slugs and others).

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

rivers and streams

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none

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