

smooth softshell *Apalone mutica*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Testudines

Family: Trionychidae

ILLINOIS STATUS threatened, native

FEATURES

The female smooth softshell turtle averages seven to 14 inches in length while the male is usually five to seven inches long. This turtle's shell is soft, smooth and leathery with no scales or scutes (plates). It gives the animal a pancakelike appearance. The plastron (lower shell) is white. A single light stripe extends from the eye to the throat on each side of the head. The smooth softshell turtle has a pointed nose.

BEHAVIORS

The smooth softshell turtle lives in rivers that have many sand bars and clean, sandy bottoms. It is a powerful swimmer and moves well on land, too. It buries itself in sand with only the head sticking out far enough to reach above the water's surface for breathing. This turtle searches for food in the early morning and late evening. It will bury itself in mud to overwinter. The mating season lasts from April through May. The female deposits between five and 31 eggs in a sandbank near the river during early summer. The site is always in direct sunlight. The number of eggs produced depends on the female's size (the larger her size, the greater the number of eggs). Eggs hatch in September. This animal eats crustaceans, fishes, amphibians, insects and mollusks (snails, slugs and others).

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

rivers and streams

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none

© Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 2019. Biodiversity of Illinois.