

## spiny softshell *Apalone spinifera*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Testudines

Family: Trionychidae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

### FEATURES

The female spiny softshell turtle averages seven to 17 inches in length while the male is about five to nine and one-fourth inches long. The tan shell is leathery and covered with bumps. It has no scales or scutes (plates). Each side of the head has a light stripe behind the eye and a light line behind the jaw. The neck and legs are olive with dark mottling. The feet are strongly spotted or streaked.

### BEHAVIORS

The spiny softshell turtle may be found statewide in Illinois. This aquatic turtle lives in rivers and bodies of still water that have sand bars or mud bars. It is a powerful swimmer that is very agile on land, too. It basks on sand bars. This softshell turtle buries itself in sand with only the head sticking out far enough to reach above the water's surface for breathing. The spiny softshell hunts for food in the early morning and late evening. It will bite and scratch if disturbed. It buries itself in mud or sand to overwinter. The mating season occurs in April and May. The female deposits about 18 eggs in a nest dug in the sand from mid-May through July. Up to four clutches per year per female may be deposited. The nest is generally placed in full sunlight. Eggs hatch in August, September or October. This turtle eats aquatic animals it can capture, including crayfish, insects, fishes, frogs, tadpoles and mollusks (snails, slugs and others).

### HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

lakes, ponds and reservoirs; rivers and streams

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none

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