

SNAPPING TURTLE

Chelydra serpentina



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IDENTIFICATION

SIZE:

Maximum carapace (shell) size is 20 inches (50 cm), with an average size of about 14 inches (36 cm). Average weight is 10-35 lbs (5-16 kg).

COLOR:

Head and carapace are green to dark brown. Skin is more yellowish and lighter compared to the shell.

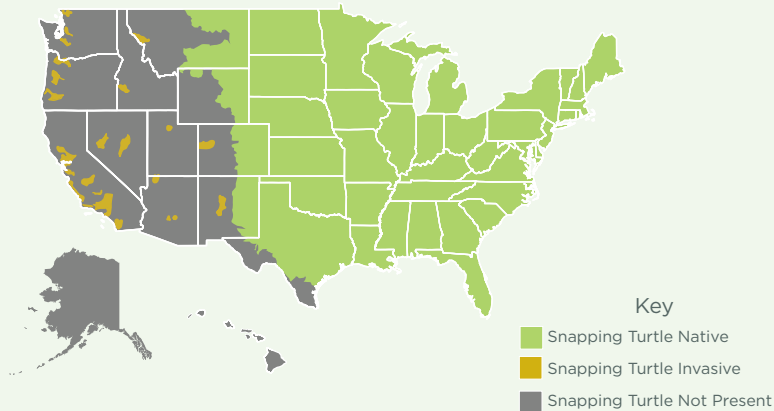
SHAPE:

Carapace has jagged scales on top and serrated edges towards the back. Tail is almost as long as the shell and has a jagged crest of scales. It cannot fit its body into its shell. Legs are very thick and strong with heavy claws.

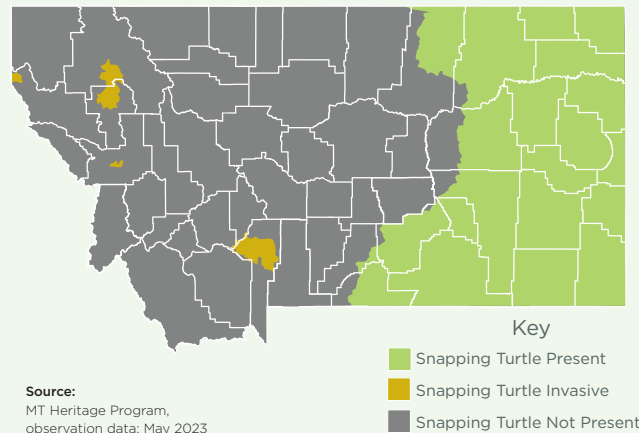
For more detailed information on Protecting Montana Waters from Aquatic Invasive Species visit

<https://fwp.mt.gov/conservation/aquatic-invasive-species>

DISTRIBUTION



Source:
USGS NAS; May 2023



Source:
MT Heritage Program,
observation data; May 2023

HABITAT:

Ponds, lakes, slow moving streams, preferring muddy bottoms.

NATIVE TO:

Eastern United States (including eastern Montana)

PREVENTION AND SPREAD:

In non-native range, introduction was most likely from illegal pet release. Turtles can travel via water and over land. Snapping turtles can live to be 50 years old and can start reproduction around age 4. To prevent the spread, never release a pet snapping turtle into the wild.

IMPACTS:

Snapping turtles will eat anything they can fit in their mouth, which can have harmful impacts on native plant and animal populations. They can also pass parasites to native turtles.

NATIVE LOOKALIKES:

The length of the snapping turtle's tail (as long as its shell) sets it apart from native turtle species in Montana.

IN MONTANA:

Native in Montana east of the Continental Divide. Outside their native range, snapping turtles are well-established in the Flathead Watershed and have been observed in smaller numbers in the Clark Fork and Bitterroot Watersheds.

Sources:
Montana Field Guide, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

If you see or suspect a new infestation of an invasive plant or animal, please save a specimen, and record the location.

Report observations to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at
<https://fwp.mt.gov/conservation/aquatic-invasive-species/report-an-ais>
Or call the MT FWP front desk at 406-444-2440

