



stinkpot

Sternotherus odoratus

Kingdom: Animalia
Division/Phylum: Chordata - vertebrates
Class: Reptilia
Order: Testudines
Family: Kinosternidae

Features

These drab little turtles are about the size and shape of a large duck's egg. They are up to 4 1/8 inches long. They are gray to brown on the back with faint brown lines radiating from the middle line of the back in young turtles. The carapace (upper shell) is smooth, but often pitted. The plastron (lower shell) has only one hinge, but there is soft tissue between the scutes (plates) of the plastron, which appears a little too small for the turtle. The neck is dark gray to black with small white bumps that may be organized to form stripes. The white bumps also are present on the legs. There are two distinct barbels (fleshy "whiskers") on the chin with smaller ones behind them.

Natural History

Stinkpots are feisty turtles when handled. They eat insects, snails, crayfish, and dead animals. Stinkpots are found in backwaters and sandy ponds along rivers. They secrete an unpleasant smelling musk from glands near their lower shell. They are secretive and rarely seen. Only five populations have been found along the lower Iowa and Cedar Rivers and the Mississippi River.

Habitats

Mississippi River; interior rivers and streams

Iowa Status

threatened; native

Loss of backwater areas associated with large rivers due to channelization has eliminated stinkpot habitat.

Iowa Range

eastern edge of Iowa

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001.
Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats CD-ROM.