



yellow mud turtle

Kinosternon flavescens

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

Features

The yellow mud turtle has an almost box turtle-like appearance with a domed carapace (upper shell) and hinges that close the plastron (lower shell). Unlike box turtles, its plastron has two hinges and it lacks yellow markings. It is black to chocolate brown above and the plastron is a dull yellow. The undersides of the chin, neck, and legs are yellowish cream to gray. It is similar to stinkpots, which are smaller, even less colorful, and have soft tissue between the scutes (plates) of the single hinged plastron. Mud turtles usually are between 3 1/2 to 5 3/4 inches long.

Natural History

Iowa's yellow mud turtles are found only where shallow, often temporary, bodies of water are adjacent to soils that are nearly pure sand. They eat fish (mostly dead), crayfish, insects, snails, and plant debris. Mud turtles are docile, usually withdrawing into their shells when disturbed. They leave the water to bury themselves in the sand in mid-July and most remain there through the winter. Mud turtles do not

reach sexual maturity until they are about seven years old. Courtship and mating occur in late spring to summer. Egg laying in sand seems to occur in July or August with the female laying two to four white eggs. Young appear to hatch in the fall.

Habitats

Mississippi River; bottomland forests; temporary water supplies

Iowa Status

endangered; native

Iowa populations require pools of water near soil that are pure sand where they bury themselves in mid-summer and during hibernation. Siltation of floodplains eliminates these sandy areas.

Iowa Range

southeast corner of Iowa

Bibliography

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