



## Northern Map Turtle (*Graptemys geographica*)

*Grap-tem-ees geo-graph-ick-ah*



**Description:** 4 to 7 ½" carapace length for males, 6 to 12" carapace length for females. This is a medium sized to large semi aquatic turtle with a brown to olive brown carapace with a weak mid vertebral dorsal keel tending to be most pronounced on males and juveniles. An intricate series of pale lines on the carapace resemble that of a topographic map, hence the name "map" turtle. The rear marginal scutes are weakly serrated and the plastron is usually a pale cream or yellow. The skin on the head, neck, and limbs tends to be blackish to olive with numerous yellowish to light colored lines on the head, neck, and limbs. The jaws are much lighter colored, and there is a small, pale yellowish spot on the head behind each eye, which distinguishes the northern map turtle from other map turtle species in Wisconsin.

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**Taxonomy and Classification:**

**Life:** All living, physical, and animate entities

**Domain:** Eukaryota

**Kingdom:** Animalia

**Phylum:** Chordata/Vertebrata

**Class:** Reptilia

**Order:** Testudines

**Suborder:** Cryptodira

**Family:** Emydidae

**Genus:** Graptemys

**Species:** *Graptemys geographica*\*

*\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

**Similar/Confusing Species:** The northern map turtle can be distinguished from the southern/Ouachita map turtle (*Graptemys ouachitensis*) and false map turtle (*Graptemys pseudogeographica*) by the pale or light colored spots behind the eyes and around their jaws, and somewhat pronounced dorsal keel on the carapace. Painted turtles (*Chrysemys picta*) are smaller, and lack dorsal keels on the carapace, and lack serrated rear marginal scutes. Pond sliders (*Trachemys scripta*) lack topographic lines on the carapace and scutes.

**Etymology:** Graptemys- Grapho (write) emydo (freshwater tortoise). geographica-geo (Earth) grapho (write).

**Subspecies:** None.

**Range & Habitat:** Locally common in southwestern, western, south central, and east central portions of the state. The most widely distributed species of map turtle in WI, northern map turtles occur in most medium to large, weedy river ways and their tributaries, oxbow lakes, sloughs, marshes, and river backwaters.

**Habits & Natural History:** Northern map turtles, formerly known as the common map turtle, is a medium sized to large semi aquatic turtle that can frequently be observed basking individually or in numbers, sometimes along with other map turtle species, on emergent or overhanging logs, shorelines, and other shoreline vegetation and sand bars where they will quickly dive into the water if approached too closely. Map turtle species exhibit sexual dimorphism (with females the larger of the two), as well as morphological differences reflecting differing dietary habits. Females generally possess larger heads and jaws designed for consuming hard shelled mollusks. These large turtles are primarily carnivorous as adults, feeding on small fish, frogs, aquatic crustaceans, insects, and mollusks, and are able to crush and swallow these prey items using their strong and powerful jaws. Northern map turtles emerge in March or April, and large adult females can often be observed travelling overland in May and June seeking sandy or gravelly nesting sites.

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**Phenology:** Northern map turtles will begin emerging from overwintering and mating as early as early April through May, and remain active throughout the year through September or October (or sometimes even later in the year if warmer temperatures persist or otherwise permit). Many Wisconsin turtles begin moving over land and are often encountered during May through early July as they search for sandy nesting sites.

**Conservation Status:** WI Locally Common. Regulated by WI DNR. IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

**Contact**

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this species, group of species, or this informational sheet, please email and contact the Madison Area Herpetological Society at [info@madisonherps.org](mailto:info@madisonherps.org)

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