



## Southern Map Turtle (*Graptemys ouachitensis*)

*Grap-tem-ees which-it-ten-sis*



\*Mike Day

**Description:** 4 to 7 ½” carapace length for males, 6 to 10” carapace length for females. This is a medium sized to large semi aquatic turtle with a brown to olive brown carapace with a strong 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 with heavy dark mottling. 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 pair of large, pale yellowish crescents on the head behind each eye, which distinguishes the Ouachita map turtle from other map turtle species in Wisconsin.

### **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

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**Genus:** Graptemys

**Species:** *Graptemys ouachitensis*\*

\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

**Similar/Confusing Species:** The southern/Ouachita map turtle can be distinguished from the northern map turtle (*Graptemys geographica*) and false map turtle (*Graptemys pseudogeographica*) by the wider crescent shaped markings behind the eyes, and much more 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). ouachitensis-belonging to the Ouachita Mountains, AR.

**Subspecies:** Ouachita Map Turtle (*Graptemys o. ouachitensis*).

**Range & Habitat:** Generally occurs in, and is restricted to southwestern and western Wisconsin in major river ways (Wisconsin, Mississippi, and St. Croix), and their major tributaries.

**Habits & Natural History:** Ouachita map turtles, are a medium sized to large semi aquatic turtle that can frequently be observed basking individually or in numbers 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. 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. 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. Ouachita 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.

**Phenology:** Southern 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 Special Concern. 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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