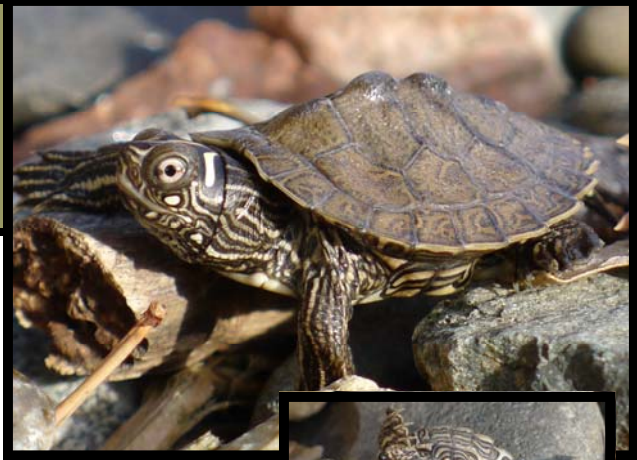


# Ouachita Map Turtle

aka Southern Map Turtle  
*Graptemys o. ouachitensis*  
Natural History



**Description:** Map Turtles are often referred to as “*Saw Backs*” due to their ridged 5-10 inch carapace. The name Map Turtle likely originated from the light lines on the carapace which resemble map lines. The plastron is yellow with black markings that fade with age. Males have more pronounced ridges than females, grow longer front claws and only grow to be half the size of females. The Ouachita Map Turtle (*wa-chi-tau*) is similar to the False Map Turtle and some consider it to be a subspecies. The differentiating features are the size and location of the yellow face markings. Ouachita Map Turtles have three yellow blotches, one behind the eye, one just below the eye and the third is just below the mouth line.

**Vocalizations:** These turtles use touch and olfactory cues to communicate with a each other.

**Breeding:** Nests are located near water in sandy soil and contain 8-22 white, elliptical eggs. Hatchlings remain underground until the yolk sac is completely absorbed. Incubation temperature influences head patterns and the sex of the hatchlings! Temperatures of 77 degrees and lower results in more males. False Map Turtles and Ouachita Map Turtles hybridize and one nest may include both kinds of hatchlings.

**Distribution:** Map Turtles are endemic to the North America and scientists currently recognize 13 species. Ouachita Map Turtles are found predominately in the Mississippi River System, although there are some introduced Ouachita Map Turtles in Florida.

**Habitat:** These turtles are very aquatic and are active from April - October. They overwinter by burrowing into the river bottom, preferring rivers with sandy/silty bottoms.

**Diet:** Map Turtles are diurnal, generalist, omnivores. Their strong jaws allow them to eat freshwater mussels, snails and crayfish as well as small fish, insects, worms and even some vegetation. In Eastern species the female’s larger size and biting power enables her to feed on more mollusks, while the males feed more on insects. There is a study indicating that this preference is reversed in Ouachita Map Turtles with females preferring more plant matter, while the males are more carnivorous.



**Lifespan:** The estimated lifespan of the Ouachita Map Turtle is likely 30-50 years, similar to that of other Map Turtle species. It is difficult to reliably determine the age of Map Turtles over 15 years of age as the rings on their epidermal scutes become less and less visible.

**Conservation Status:** Ouachita Map Turtles are considered “Locally Common” in Wisconsin and “Least Concern” in Minnesota. In the southeastern U.S. Map Turtle species can be found that are isolated to one or two waterways, leading a number of species to be of significant conservation concern. All Map Turtle species are susceptible to water pollution, over-collection for the pet trade, human recreational use of sandbars, freshwater habitat destruction and even the decline of freshwater mussels may affect some populations of map turtles.