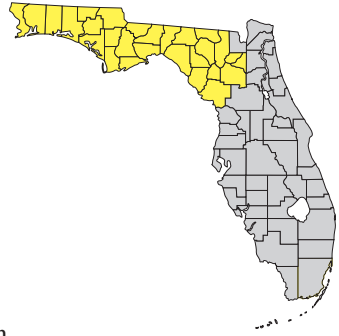


# ALLIGATOR SNAPPING TURTLE

*Macrolemys temminckii*  
(*Macrochelys* in some references)



**Order:** Testudines  
**Family:** Chelydridae  
**FNAI Ranks:** G3G4/S3  
**U.S. Status:** None  
**FL Status:** Species of Special Concern

State possession limit of one turtle; illegal to buy or sell species or its parts.



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**Description:** A freshwater turtle reaching immense proportions, adult males as large as 30 in. (760 mm) shell length and 200 lbs. (90 kg); females smaller (to 24 in. = 610 mm). Both common and alligator

snappers have rough brown shells and very long tails, nearly as long as body. *Macrolemys* has three sharp ridges or keels that run length of upper shell (carapace), very large head that is roughly triangular from above, strongly hooked beak, mouth that is brownish-gray inside, eyes on sides rather than top of head, and an extra row of scales near edge of carapace between outer ring of marginal scales and large inner costal scales. Hooked beak and shell ridges may be weak or lost in old adults.

## ALLIGATOR SNAPPING TURTLE

*Macrolemys temminckii*

**Similar Species:** Often confused with common snapping turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*), which can also reach large size (to 18 in. = 460 mm). Although common snappers may have low keels on carapace, especially when young, these are never as pronounced as on *Macrolemys*. Also, eyes are near top of head, beak less strongly hooked, mouth lining pink to white, head more rounded above, extra scale row absent from carapace, and neck much longer. Last trait allows species to strike more rapidly and viciously than its larger relative.

**Habitat:** Strictly a turtle of rivers, though utilizes backwater swamps, overflow lakes, and impoundments as well as main channels.

**Seasonal Occurrence:** Present year-round but rarely observed because of secretive, bottom-dwelling habits. Females nest in late April and May, with young emerging in August and September.

**Florida Distribution:** Only in rivers draining into the upper Gulf of Mexico, from the Suwannee River westward throughout the panhandle. Populations are known from the Suwannee, Ochlockonee, Apalachicola, Econfinia Creek, Choctawhatchee, Yellow, East Bay River, Blackwater, and Escambia drainages.

**Range-wide Distribution:** Principally rivers of the lower Gulf coastal plain from Florida to eastern Texas, extending northward to southern Illinois and Missouri along the Mississippi River.

**Conservation Status:** Subject to some debate, though unquestionably reduced by long-term commercial trapping in much of its range. Still common in some Florida rivers. Much of the floodplains of inhabited rivers in Florida has been protected by state and federal land acquisition, but water quality of several rivers remains threatened by pollution. The Apalachicola River in particular is threatened by growing demand for water by the greater Atlanta metropolitan area.

**Protection and Management:** Publicly acquire remaining unprotected floodplains and uplands bordering all inhabited rivers. Protect water quality and flow of inhabited river systems, including tributaries. Increase enforcement of regulations prohibiting commercial collecting (i.e., poaching).

**Selected References:** Ashton and Ashton 1991, Bartlett and Bartlett 1999, Conant and Collins 1991, Ernst et al. 1994, Ewert and Jackson 1994, Georgia DNR 1999, Moler (ed.) 1992, Moler 1996, Mount 1975, Pritchard 1989.