

## SPOTTED TURTLE

*Clemmys guttata*

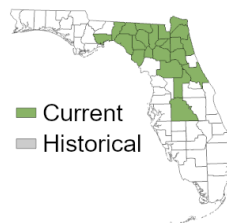
**Order:** Testudines

**Family:** Emydidae

**FNAI Ranks:** G5/S2S3

**U.S. Status:** none

**FL Status:** none



**Description:** A small (to 5 in. = 127 mm), mostly black turtle with bright yellow to orange spots on head and shell. Each large scale of upper shell (carapace) with one to several small yellowish dots, though these may fade in older animals and be obscure to absent in hatchlings. Carapace smooth, lacking a central ridge over back in both adults and hatchlings. Lower shell (plastron) lacks a hinge and has areas of yellow to salmon pink toward midline and on borders of moderate to large black blotches that may cover half to most of each scale. Skin of legs usually charcoal above and pink to orange below.

**Similar Species:** This is the only small, turtle in Florida with a hingeless plastron and scattered yellow dots on a black carapace. The lower shell of box turtles (*Terrapene*) has a moveable hinge, and the yellow pattern on the carapace tends more to streaks than isolated dots; hatchlings, which appear similar to spotted turtle, have a pronounced ridge along the back.

**Habitat:** Shallow lentic wetlands with an abundance of downed woody debris are favored sites in Florida (Mays 2017). Typical habitats range-wide include bogs, swamps, shallow wooded ponds and streams, and ditches; characteristic features are slow-moving or still waters with a soft bottom and abundant vegetation, often with sphagnum moss. The species is very secretive, remaining hidden most of time.

**Seasonal Occurrence:** Secretive most of year; nearly all observations are from March - early May, when individuals tend to wander overland.

**Florida Distribution:** The known range encompasses disjunct locations chiefly across the northern half of the peninsula, with an isolated record at St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge in the Panhandle. Although the combined area encompassed by these records is about 24,000 sq. km, this overestimates the true range, and the actual amount of occupied habitat is certainly much lower.

**Range-wide Distribution:** Atlantic Coastal Plain from Florida to Maine, and westward across northern U.S. and southern Canada to Lake Michigan.

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**Conservation Status:** May have been reduced in some regions by collecting for pet trade. Florida records are known from at least one national wildlife refuge, one state forest, and several state water and wildlife conservation areas.

**Protection and Management:** Maintain natural characteristics of shallow freshwater lentic wetlands; in particular, avoid ditching, excessive groundwater withdrawal, and pollution. In surrounding uplands, limit development, timbering or forestry, and soil and groundcover disturbance. The species should be able to tolerate fire and selective timber harvest as long as activities do not degrade wetland habitat. Fire breaks around wetlands are unnecessary and possibly even detrimental. Roads through wetlands should be closed or elevated; if this is not practical, wide culverts should be installed, particularly at points where turtles are known to cross.

**References:** Ashton and Ashton 1991, Barnwell et al. 1997, Bartlett and Bartlett 1999, Ernst and Lovich 2009, Georgia DNR 1999, Moler (ed.) 1992, Powell et al. 2016.



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