

ESCAMBIA MAP TURTLE

Graptemys ernsti

Order: Testudines

Family: Emydidae

FNAI Ranks: G2/S2

U.S. Status: none

FL Status: none



Description: Young and male map turtles are readily identified by a series of spines on the raised keel along middle of back. In *G. ernsti*, spines are reduced to knobs in adult females, which grow considerably larger (to 11 in. = 280 mm shell length) than males (6 in. = 152 mm) and develop massive heads for crushing mollusks. Shells of both sexes gray to olive above and pale yellow below. Upper surface of each marginal scale around rim of upper shell (carapace) bears single vertical yellow bar. Large, yellowish blotch between eyes usually has three forward prongs and rarely or only narrowly connects to large yellow blotch behind each eye. Neck has many yellow stripes, two of which extend forward atop neck to end in bulbous expansions between postorbital blotches.

Similar Species: Escambia and Barbour's map turtles (*Graptemys barbouri*; see species account) differ in fine details of color pattern on head and carapace (compare species accounts), but are nonetheless difficult even for experts to distinguish; surest method is to base identification upon river of origin, as the two have non-overlapping ranges. The spines or knobs along backs of map turtles readily distinguish them from other non-hatchling freshwater turtles in Florida.

Habitat: Large and medium-sized rivers, usually favoring areas with good flow and avoiding backwaters. Nesting occurs along sand bars and river berms.

Seasonal Occurrence: Present year-round, but basking individuals are more conspicuous from late spring through fall. Females nest in late spring and early summer.

Florida Distribution: Western Panhandle, specifically Pensacola (including Escambia) Bay drainages, including the Escambia River, Yellow and Shoal rivers; also reported from the Choctawhatchee and Pea rivers (Lovich and McCoy 1992, 1994; Lovich et al. 2011; Ennen et al. 2016), although populations there show evidence of hybridization with the sympatric *G. barbouri* (Godwin et al. 2014).

Range-wide Distribution: Escambia/Conecuh and Yellow/Shoal river systems

Escambia Map Turtle

Graptemys ernsti

of extreme western Florida and adjacent southern Alabama.

Conservation Status: Much of the land bordering Escambia and Yellow rivers is in public ownership. However, water quality of these rivers is degraded by pollution, particularly from a paper mill in Alabama along the Escambia River.

Protection and Management: Maintain water quality and quantity as well as natural ecosystem integrity of inhabited rivers. Eliminate or at least limit all sources of water pollution in these rivers. Additionally, avoid dredging, channelization, impoundment, and removal of snags.

References: Ashton and Ashton 1991, Bartlett and Bartlett 1999, Conant and Collins 1991, Ernst et al. 1994, Moler (ed.) 1992, Mount 1975, Shealy 1976.



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juvenile © Robert S. Simmons