



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Western Chicken Turtle

Arlington, Texas Ecological Services Field Office

Western Chicken Turtle

Deirochelys reticularia miaria

Status

The western chicken turtle was petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act in 2010. A positive 90-day finding was issued in 2011, indicating listing may be warranted for this species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is completing a more in-depth review and will issue a 12-month finding in 2025.

Description

The western chicken turtle is the smallest of the three subspecies of chicken turtles. It is a small to medium-sized freshwater turtle that is easily identified by its extraordinarily long, striped neck. The egg-shaped carapace (top half of the shell) is rough textured and tends to be olive to brown in color with a faint cream, yellow, or orange netlike pattern. The rim of the shell is bordered with yellow. The plastron, or bottom half of the shell, is yellow and unmarked except for a few dark marks along the seams of the scutes. The head is small, and the front legs have a wide yellow stripe down the front. The hind legs are striped with alternating light and dark lines on the rear surface. The tail is relatively short, with the tail of the male noticeably longer than that of the female. The western chicken turtle is often observed basking on or near

water but can also be encountered traveling on land. Though generally shy, individuals may bite when intimidated.

Distribution

The range of the western chicken turtle includes the Gulf Coast Plains west of the Mississippi River, which includes Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma (see attached map).

Life History

The western chicken turtle is a relatively short-lived turtle, with a maximum age of 20 to 24 years. It is primarily active from February through July. Courtship and mating occur from spring to early summer, followed by a migration to an upland site, where it will estivate underground for the remainder of the summer, fall and winter. The male western chicken turtle reaches sexual maturity in 2 to 4 years and the female reaches sexual maturity in 6 to 8 years. The female excavates a cavity 4 inches deep and deposits 5 to 15 elliptical eggs approximately 1 3/8 inches long. Females can lay several clutches of eggs in a single season. During the first year of life, western chicken turtles are carnivorous; as they develop into



Western Chicken Turtle - (Photo Credit – Dr. Toby)

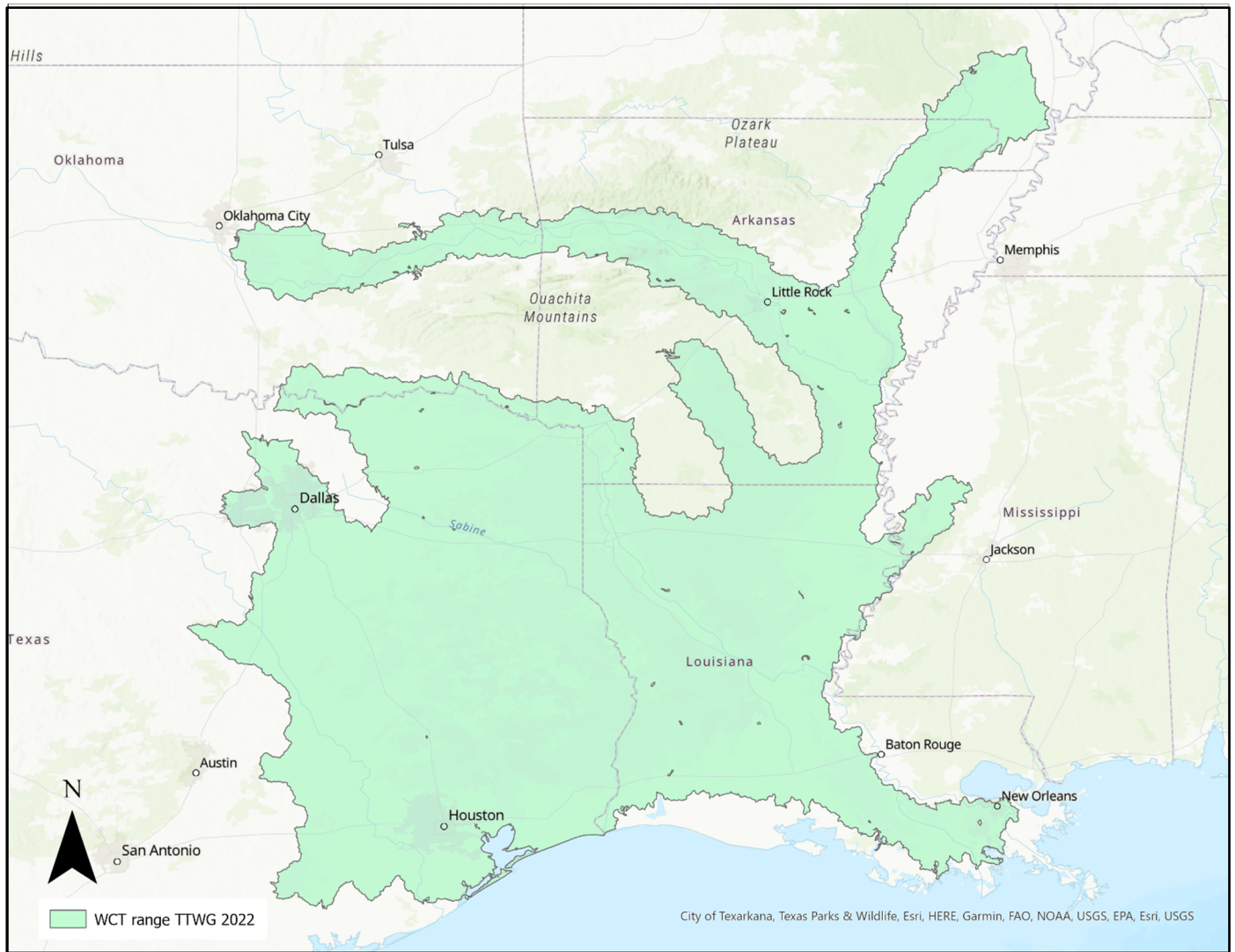
adults, they become more omnivorous and primarily feed on plants, aquatic insects, and crayfish.

Habitat

The western chicken turtle is found in semi-aquatic areas that contain slow-moving and shallow water, such as ponds, lakes, streams and swamps. Like other species of turtles, the western chicken turtle will migrate between aquatic habitats to seek soils to burrow into to escape dry conditions. Soft mud and aquatic vegetation will often be used during hibernation.

Conservation

The western chicken turtle is presumed to be rare and declining throughout its range. However, no range-wide assessment has been conducted; therefore, the current understanding of population status and trends is limited. Habitat loss, habitat modification and road mortality are believed to be the greatest threats to the western chicken turtle.



Western Chicken Turtle Range (Photo credit - Turtle Taxonomic Working Group [TTWG])

References

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