



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Western Chicken Turtle

Arlington, Texas Ecological Services Field Office

Western Chicken Turtle

Deirochelys reticularia miaria

Description

The western chicken turtle 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 (individual plates that comprise the shell). 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

In Texas, the western chicken turtle's historical range once comprised the entire eastern third of the state. Confirmed occurrences in Texas are currently limited to six counties: Falls, Harris, Hill, Nacogdoches, Montgomery and Waller.



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

Life History

The male western chicken turtle reaches sexual maturity in 2 to 4 years and females reach sexual maturity in 6 to 8 years. One female can lay several clutches of eggs in a single season. The female excavates a cavity 4 inches deep and deposits 5 to 15 elliptical eggs approximately 1 3/8 inches long. During the first year of life, western chicken turtles are carnivorous; as they develop they become more omnivorous. Adults primarily feed on plants, aquatic insects and crayfish.

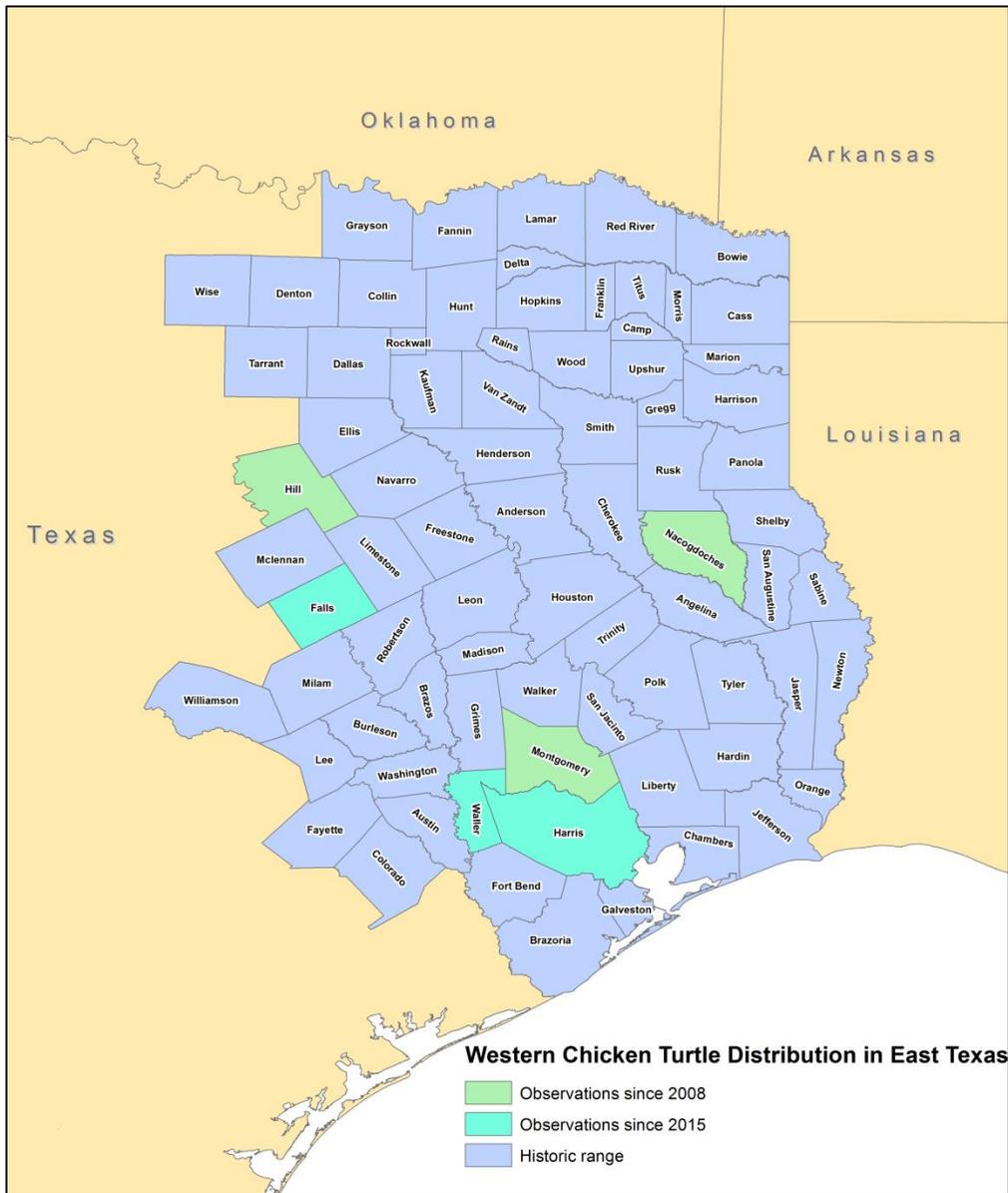
Habitat

The western chicken turtle is found in semi-aquatic areas that contain slow-moving and shallow water, such as, ponds, lakes, streams and swamps.

Similar to 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. Commercial harvest for the pet trade and habitat loss are believed to be the greatest threats to the western chicken turtle in Texas.



Counties in Texas where the western chicken turtle has been documented.

References

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