

TEXAS TURTLE REGULATIONS



Texas Administrative Code

TITLE 31 NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION
PART 2..... TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT
CHAPTER 65..... WILDLIFE
SUBCHAPTER O.... COMMERCIAL NONGAME PERMITS
RULE §65.331 Commercial Activity

- (a) Policy. The department shall develop a policy for periodic evaluation of pertinent information or evidence to determine if a species should be added to or removed from the lists of species in this section.
- (b) Turtles.
 - (1) The holder of a nongame permit may possess, transport, sell, import, or export Common Snapping Turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*), Red-eared Slider (*Trachemys scripta*), or softshell turtle (*Apalone spinifera*, *A. muticus*) in accordance with the provisions of this subchapter, provided that take occurs on private land or private water.
 - (2) The holder of a nongame dealer's permit may possess, transport, sell, resell, import, or export Common Snapping Turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*), Red-eared Slider (*Trachemys scripta*), or softshell turtle (*Apalone spinifera*, *A. muticus*) in accordance with the provisions of this subchapter, provided that take occurs on private land or private water.
 - (3) No person while on or in public water may possess or use a net or trap capable of catching a turtle. This section does not apply to:
 - (A) dip nets; or
 - (B) minnow traps, provided the minnow trap is less than 24 inches in length or has a throat smaller than one by three inches.
- (c) It is an offense for any person to take or attempt to take nongame wildlife for purposes of commercial activity from public land or water.
- (d) The species of nongame wildlife listed in this paragraph may be possessed, purchased, sold, offered for sale, imported, or exported as provided under this subchapter.

How to use a Dichotomous Key

A dichotomous key is a tool to assist the user in identifying something and contains a series of choices that lead the user to the item's correct name. Dichotomous means divided into two parts. A dichotomous key always has two choices or couplets in each step. Begin by thoroughly reading each couplet. Then decide which couplet describes the item in question. At the end of each couplet will be either a name of the item or a number that indicates the next couplets that need to be read. The user continues until the item is identified.

Here is an example for this turtle key.

Let's say that the turtle in question is a **red-eared slider**.

If you didn't know what type of turtle you had, you could use the key to find out. You begin by reading the first couplet:

- 1a. Carapace (upper shell) soft..... *Apalone* (Softshell turtles) 2
- 1b. Carapace hard..... 4

The upper shell of the turtle is hard, so you would go to couplets 4a and 4b and read them thoroughly:

- 4a. Tail more than half the length of the plastron (bottom shell); bridge (area of the shell between the front and rear legs that connect the carapace and plastron) at least twice as long as wide (Snapping turtles) 5
- 4b. Tail less than half the length of the plastron; bridge equal to or slightly longer than wide 6

The turtle in your hand has a tail that is half the length of the plastron, and the bridge is equal or slightly longer than wide. So you then would go to couplets 6a and 6b and read them thoroughly:

- 6a. A wide and prominent yellow, orange, or red stripe or blotch behind eye.... 7
- 6b. An absent or narrow yellow stripe behind eye

Hard shelled turtles that may NOT be collected.

The turtle in your hand has a red blotch behind the eye. So you then go to the couplets 7a and 7b and read them thoroughly:

- 7a. A large dark-bordered orange spot behind eye; carapace light brown to tan, some with net-like pattern; plastron without a pattern or with a faint intricate central pattern

Big Bend Slider (*Trachemys gaigeae*). May NOT be collected.

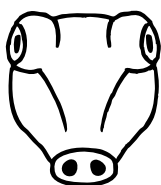
- 7b. A long red bar behind eye, occasionally constricted in middle or broken in two; old males may be melanistic (dark); carapace usually dark brown to black with yellowish lines; plastron with paired, solid dark blotches

Red-eared Slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*).

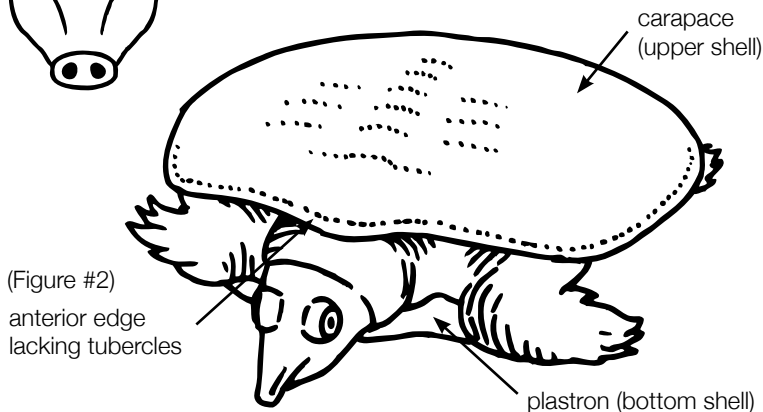
Couplet 7b describes your turtle.

TURTLE KEY

- 1a. Carapace (upper shell) soft *Apalone* (Softshell turtles) 2
- 1b. Carapace hard 4
- 2a. Horizontal ridge through nasal septum (division between nostrils) absent (Figure #1); anterior (front) edge of carapace smooth, lacking tubercles (small bumps) (Figure #2).....
Midland Smooth Softshell Turtle (*Apalone mutica mutica*)



(Figure #1)
nasal septum lacking horizontal ridge



(Figure #2)
anterior edge
lacking tubercles

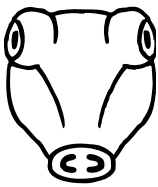
2b. Horizontal ridge through nasal septum present (Figure #3);
 tubercles present along anterior edge of carapace (Figure #4).
 NOTE: Four subspecies diagnostic characteristics not absolute,
 known from separate river systems.

Spiny Softshell Turtle (*Apalone spinifera*)3

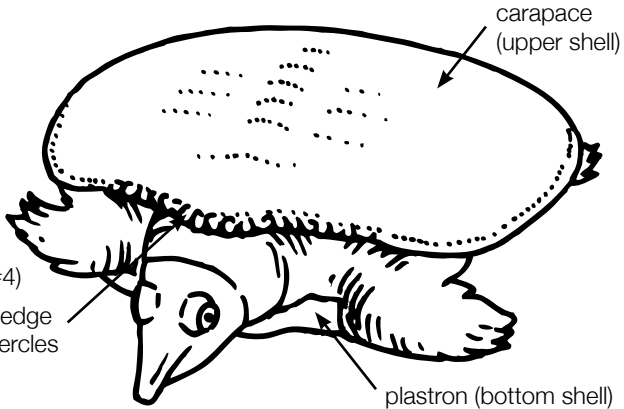


Spiny Softshell Turtle

James Rice



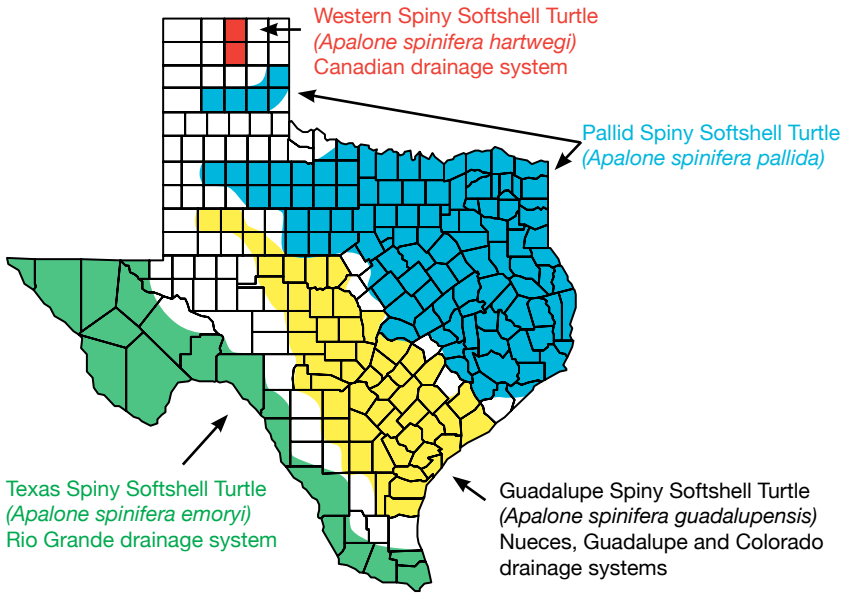
(Figure #3)
 nasal septum with horizontal ridge



(Figure #4)
 anterior edge
 with tubercles

carapace
 (upper shell)

plastron (bottom shell)



- 3a. Pale rim around outer margin of carapace absent, or pale rim less than 4 times as wide posteriorly (back) as laterally (side); pale stripe behind eye not interrupted 3c and 3d
- 3b. Pale rim of carapace 4 or more times wider posteriorly than laterally; stripe behind the eye usually interrupted. Occurs in Rio Grande drainage system (see map).....
Texas Spiny Softshell Turtle (*Apalone spinifera emoryi*).
- 3c. Carapace with white tubercles; ocelli (eyelike spots) on carapace usually absent unless surrounding white tubercles3e and 3f
- 3d. White tubercles absent; dark spots and ocelli on carapace usually present. Occurs in Canadian drainage system (see map).....
Western Spiny Softshell Turtle (*Apalone spinifera hartwegi*).
- 3e. White tubercles more prevalent on the posterior part of the carapace; ocelli and black spots on carapace absent. (see map for occurrence)
Pallid Spiny Softshell Turtle (*Apalone spinifera pallida*).
- 3f. Large tubercles more prevalent on the anterior part of the carapace; ocelli and black dots on carapace often present. Occurs in Nueces, Guadalupe, and Colorado drainage systems (see map).....
Guadalupe Spiny Softshell Turtle (*Apalone spinifera guadalupensis*).

4a. Tail more than half the length of the plastron (bottom shell); bridge (area of the shell between the front and rear legs that connect the carapace and plastron) at least twice as long as wide (snapping turtles)5

4b. Tail less than half the length of the plastron; bridge equal to or slightly longer than wide.....6

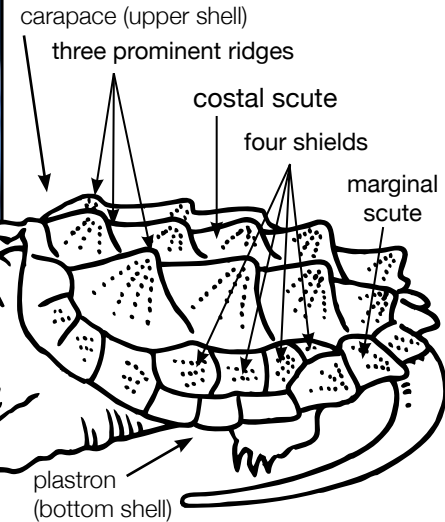
5a. Four shields (Figure #5) between marginal and costal scutes (scales on carapace); three prominent ridges on carapace; tail lacking a dorsal (upper surface) ridge.....

Alligator Snapping Turtle (*Macrocllemmys temmincki*).

May NOT be collected. Listed as threatened by the State of Texas.



James Rice



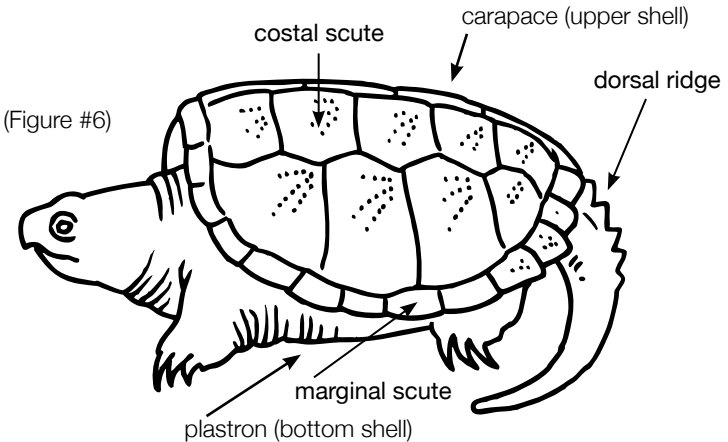
(Figure #5)

5b. Marginal scutes in contact with costal scutes along entire length of carapace (Figure #6); no prominent ridges on carapace; tail with a prominent longitudinal (running lengthwise) dorsal ridge.....
 Common Snapping Turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*).



Common Snapping Turtle

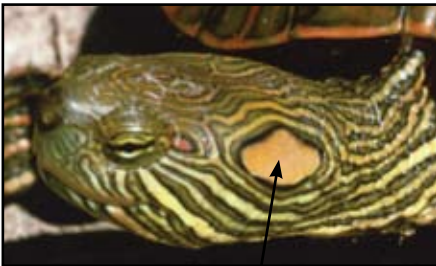
James Rice



- 6a. A wide and prominent yellow, orange, or red stripe or blotch behind eye 7
- 6b. An absent or narrow yellow stripe behind eye
Hard shelled turtles that **may NOT be collected.**
- 7a. A large dark-bordered orange spot behind eye; carapace light brown to tan, some with net-like pattern; plastron without a pattern or with a faint intricate central pattern.....
Big Bend Slider (*Trachemys gaigeae*). May NOT be collected.



Andy Price



large dark-bordered orange spot behind eye



plastron

7b. A long red bar behind eye, occasionally constricted in middle or broken in two; old males may be melanistic (dark); carapace usually dark brown to black with yellowish lines; plastron with paired, solid dark blotches.....
Red-eared Slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*).



Andy Price



Andy Price

plastron



James Rice

long red bar behind eye

NOTE: All photos by James Rice were taken at Austin Reptile Service, owner Tim Cole, www.austinreptileservice.net



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