

East African Black Mud Turtle

Pelusios subniger subniger

Conservation Story

Threats and Conservation Status

- IUCN listed as Least Concern
- Habitat loss: Many animals that inhabit wetland habitats are threatened due to habitat loss and degradation (compare to Chesapeake Bay)
- The pet trade may be a threat, more individuals are reaching American pet markets

What We Can Do

- Make environmentally responsible lifestyle decisions to help conserve habitat – conserve energy, reduce litter and pollution
 - Support legislation that helps to protect our watershed.
 - When visiting wetlands, tread lightly and stay on designated paths.
 - Use pesticides and other hazardous materials sparingly and dispose of them properly to ensure that they do not end up in waterways.
- Do your research before buying a pet:
 - Make sure you are not purchasing a wild-caught individual – captive-bred turtle species are often easy to find
 - Make sure you know how to properly care for any animal before you decide to buy it as a pet
 - Some things to consider include adequate housing, diet, temperature requirements and lifespan
 - Some pets also require a lot of time and money to be properly cared for
- Support the conservation efforts of organizations such as the Maryland Zoo and The Turtle Survival Alliance.
 - The Turtle Survival Alliance: TSA is comprised of many zoo professionals and conservationists working together to transform passion for turtles into effective conservation action through a global network of living collections and recovery programs.
 - Visit <http://www.turtlesurvival.org/> to learn more, sign up for the newsletter, and find out how to help.

Natural History

Description

- Size: 8-10 in (20-25 cm) long, weighs around 2 lbs (1 kg)
- Physical description: Carapace is streamlined and ranges in shape from oval to almost round. Skin color ranges from grey to brown to yellow; carapace color ranges from brown to black; plastron ranges from yellow to black. Considered a side-necked turtle, meaning it folds its head in sideways.
- Sexual dimorphism: Males have longer, thicker tails and a slightly concave plastron

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Habitat and Range

- Range: Eastern and southeastern Africa, Madagascar
- Habitat: Found in freshwater systems such as lakes, streams, swamps, and marshes.

Diet

- Omnivorous: Eats fish, aquatic invertebrates, amphibians, crabs, as well as aquatic plants.

Adaptations

- Shell is composed of bone and covered in scales - provides protection from predators.
- Aquatic adaptations:
 - A hydrodynamic body shape streamlines movement in the water
 - Webbed feet increase propulsion through water
 - Nostrils located near the top of the snout allow for breathing while keeping the body mostly submerged.
- Dull coloration provides camouflage.
- When conditions are too warm or dry, mud turtles aestivate (remain dormant with slowed metabolism) in underground burrows until conditions return to a suitable level.

Lifespan

- In the wild: Known up to 47 years
- In captivity: Over 50 years

Ecosystem Relationships

- Adults have few predators, although juveniles have several predators, such as birds of prey or carnivorous mammals.

Reproduction

- Behavior: Females dig nest cavities and lay their eggs in late winter or early spring.
- Development: Eggs incubate in nest for about 2 months.
- Clutch Size: 3-12 eggs per clutch

Activity

- Time of activity unknown, as they are elusive by nature and spend most of their time in water.
 - Reportedly nocturnal, but has been observed basking and wandering during the day.

Other “Fun Facts”

- A strong hinge on the plastron is a distinguishing feature of the genus *Pelusios*

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At The Zoo

- East African black mud turtles are exhibited in Chimp Forest with the slender snouted crocodiles and cichlids.

References and Additional Resources

- ARKive: <http://www.arkive.org/east-african-black-mud-turtle/pelusios-subniger/>
- The Maryland Zoo website: <http://www.marylandzoo.org/animals-conservation/reptiles/east-african-black-mud-turtle/>