

Threatened Species of the Northern Territory

GULF SNAPPING TURTLE

Elseya lavarackorum

Conservation status

Australia: Endangered

Northern Territory: Least Concern

Description

The Gulf snapping turtle is a short-necked turtle, growing to 35 cm length. It is similar to the more widespread and common northern snapping turtle *E. dentata*, but can be distinguished by an undulating (rather than straight) suture between the humeral and pectoral shields of the plastron (Wilson and Swan 2003).

Note that it was formerly listed as *Elusor lavarackorum*.

Distribution

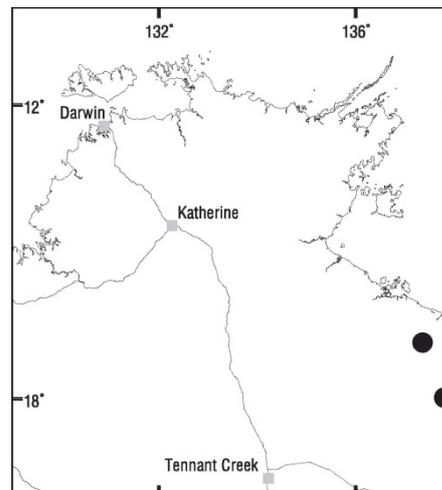
The Gulf snapping turtle is restricted to rivers draining into the Gulf of Queensland (Georges and Adams 1996). In the NT, this includes the Calvert to the Nicholson River systems (Cann 1998; A. Georges *pers. comm.*)

Conservation reserves where reported:
None.

Ecology

This freshwater turtle is mainly herbivorous, taking leaves, fruits, flowers, bark and *Pandanus* roots. Juveniles may take more animal material (mostly insect larvae), and the species may be readily trapped using meat as

bait (Cann 1998). Eggs are laid in soil near the water's edge.



Known locations of Gulf snapping turtle
● = post 1970

Conservation assessment

This species is listed as Endangered nationally, largely on the basis of a presumed small range (since known to be larger) (Thomson *et al.* 1997) and some presumed decline. Although there are few published records, it is known from many of the NT Gulf rivers, and there is no information on trends in abundance. Given the absence of marked threat, it is regarded as **Least Concern** in the NT.

Threatening processes

There is some minor level of take in fisheries; nest sites may be raided by feral pigs; stock may degrade river banks.

Conservation objectives and management

The main research priority is to better clarify its status in the NT, including an assessment of distribution, abundance, habitat requirement and threats; and to establish a monitoring program.

Compiled by

John Woinarski
[May 2006]

References

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- Georges, A., and Adams, M. (1996). Electrophoretic delineation of species boundaries within the short-necked freshwater turtles of Australia (Testudines: Chelidae). *Zoological Journal of the Linnean Society, London* **118**, 241-260.
- Thomson, S., White, A., and Georges, A. (1997). Re-evaluation of *Emydura lavarackorum*: identification of a living fossil. *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum* **42**, 327-336.
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