

LIVING with TURTLES

The Oblong turtle, also known as the Long-Necked turtle (*Chelodina colliei*), has an oblong shaped shell and a long neck. This turtle species is unique to the freshwater wetlands and waterways of Western Australia's south west.

THREATS TO THE OBLONG TURTLE

ROAD TRAFFIC

These turtles travel up to one kilometre to lay eggs away from waterways, thus many are killed being hit by motor vehicles whilst crossing nearby roads. September to January is the most vulnerable period due to travel of the females away from the water to lay eggs and the return of the hatchlings to the water. Being hit by vehicles or attacked by predators are common threats with predators attacking nests as well.

PREDATION & POACHING

The predation from feral animals is a significant threat to the native Oblong. Predators include ravens, birds of prey, cats, dogs and foxes. The poaching of turtles for pets is illegal but is also a threat.

A recent study carried out at Lake Chittering Nature Reserve in Bindoon identified the fox as the only predator to prey on Oblong turtles in this district, particularly attacking their eggs. Because the fox is an introduced species, the Oblong turtle has not been able to develop sufficient defences against the predator which is steadily playing a role in decreasing turtle populations.

HABITAT LOSS & POOR WATER QUALITY

Increased development around wetland areas leads to disjointed and reduced habitat for turtles. Urbanised wetlands in metropolitan areas also contain high nutrient levels (nitrogen and phosphorus) and heavy metals such as magnesium, mercury and copper which affect water quality. Turtles may then ingest, inhale and absorb this polluted water. Turtle shells which are heavily covered in algae suggest high nutrient levels in the water.

PHYSICAL FEATURES & BEHAVIOURS

The Oblong turtle has a long neck, and an adult carapace (upper shell) of up to 20 – 30cm which is dark brown or black. Its long neck is almost the length of its carapace with adults thus reaching up to 50cm in length. Hatchlings have a carapace roughly the size of a 20 cent coin.

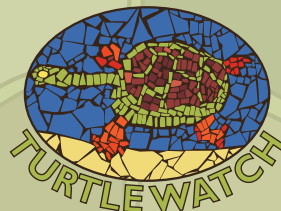
Between September and January each year, the females leave the water in search of suitable sandy soils to lay between 2 – 16 leathery eggs. Females may travel long distances during breeding months to find appropriate nesting sites, digging a hole for the eggs with her back feet.

Freshwater turtles are able to drop their body temperature, slow their pulse rate and use stored body fat instead of eating to survive in hot dry conditions. They sometimes bury themselves in mud or under leaves or logs, conserving body fluids until conditions are more habitable. This ability is known as aestivation. When this occurs turtles can be more vulnerable to predators and human activity such as clearing and ground works.

DISTRIBUTION & HABITAT

The turtle is found in waterways of the Perth metropolitan area and throughout the south west, extending north to Hill River, inland to Toodyay, Pingelly and Katanning and east along to the south coast to the Fitzgerald River National Park.

It occurs in permanent and seasonal freshwater habitats including rivers, lakes, farm dams, swamps, damplands and natural and constructed wetlands.



WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Due to the many threats facing the Oblong turtle it is important to identify exactly when and where the turtle migration occurs.

Record sightings at climatewatch.org.au or call your nearest Turtle Watch Helpline:

Your participation will contribute to improved knowledge and action in relation to Oblong turtle conservation.



9411 3444



9417 8460



9461 7160



9417 7105



9458 5664



Herdsmen Lake
Wildlife Centre
9387 6079

FREQUENTLY asked QUESTIONS

What do I do if I find an injured turtle?

Ensure that the turtle is in fact injured before intervening. A turtle may be injured by a car or attacked by a dog in which case it won't be moving much. If the turtle appears lethargic and dehydrated it is probably injured.

Contact the Wildcare Helpline (9474 9055) who can put you in touch with a wildlife carer. If in the Cockburn region call Native ARC (9417 7105).

Turtles can make remarkable recoveries from serious injuries.



Can I take a turtle from its natural habitat and keep it as a pet?

No. Catching and keeping turtles as pets is illegal and is also a threat to population numbers.

What do I do if I find a turtle?

Check there are no threats close by and then leave the turtle alone and keep pets away. The turtle may need to be moved if it is found on a road. In this case if the road is quiet, it is best to stop, assist the turtle to cross in the same direction it was travelling and then leave it alone. If you catch a turtle and return it to the water, it will then have to make the dangerous trip again, which increases the chance of it being injured or killed.

Call your nearest Turtle Watch Helpline or go to the Climate Watch website and record your lucky sighting!

How long do turtle eggs take to hatch?

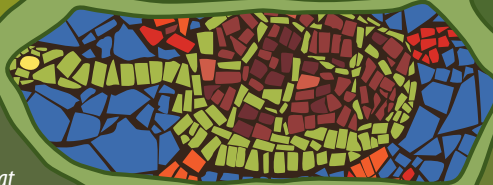
Turtle eggs take between 210 and 220 days or 26-41 weeks, depending on weather conditions and temperature, often hatching in June or July.

What do Oblong turtles eat?

The natural turtle diet includes frogs, fish and macroinvertebrates (animals with no backbone) such as insects, crustaceans, snails and worms. Turtle hatchlings may also eat aquatic plants as well as midge and mosquito larvae. This helps the natural ecosystem by controlling possible nuisance midge outbreaks.

How do they get killed if they have a shell?

It is a common misconception that Oblong turtles are able to protect themselves by retracting into their shell. Oblong turtles cannot retract their head or limbs into their shell.



What is the difference between a turtle and a tortoise?

A 'turtle' is water dwelling and a 'tortoise' is land dwelling. Turtles also have a flat shell with webbed feet and claws or flippers. Tortoises have a domed shell with short, sturdy bent legs.

How do I handle an Oblong turtle if necessary?

If instructed to handle a turtle, grasp the turtle around the middle of the carapace (upper shell) and hold the animal away from your body. This way you avoid the hind legs that may cause minor scratches by their small claws. Holding the turtle away from your body will also avoid any body secretions from the turtle.



How long do turtles live?

Turtles have a significant lifespan, which is often over 40 years.

Why is there a turtle on my property?

Female turtles travel up to one kilometre from waterways, searching for an appropriate area to nest and lay eggs. Make sure there are no threats to the turtle such as pets, leave the turtle alone and enjoy your lucky sighting. If unsure contact Native ARC (9417 7105) or your nearest Turtle Watch Helpline.

