



# Eastern long-necked turtle Malinthaipari\*

*Chelodina longicollis*

\*Ngarrindjeri name

## Status: not rated as threatened but numbers are declining

The eastern long-necked turtle is the smallest of the three species of turtle found in the Murraylands and Riverland region. Turtles play a crucial role in the River Murray ecosystem and are culturally significant to the region's First Nations. Turtles are under threat from a range of issues but there are a number of ways the community can support their conservation.

## Description

The eastern long-necked turtle has an oval shell which can vary in colour from light brown to almost black. The top of the shell (carapace) has a shallow central groove

The lower shell (plastron) is usually creamy-yellow, often with dark brown/black lines between the scutes (plates) and sometimes with other dark brown markings.

On average, the neck length is just over half of the lower shell length. The head is small and pointed and the limbs are dark grey to brown.

Eastern long-necked turtles have strong pungent smell when frightened.

## Size

The eastern long-necked turtle is the smallest of the three South Australian freshwater turtles. The shell length is 25cm on average. Males can weigh almost one kilogram and females can weigh more than 1.5 kilograms.

## Habitat

The eastern long-necked turtle is the most widespread turtle in south-eastern Australia. They live in any body of fresh water, from the main river to permanent and temporary fringing wetlands and farm dams.

Of the three South Australian freshwater turtles, the long-necked turtle is the most likely to be seen on land. They often travel from one water body to another, especially during breeding season or when competition for food in their current location is high.

## Diet

Eastern long-necked turtles are carnivores with a diverse and opportunistic diet depending on what is available at the time. They feed predominantly on small aquatic animals such as crustaceans (including zoo-plankton and yabbies) and water insects.

The turtle's long neck is used like a snake to rapidly strike at passing prey. Large food items are torn apart by the strong front claws.



Image: Jules Farquhar

## Breeding

Eastern long-necked turtles often lay eggs in November and December after heavy spring rain or storms.

Many females nest quite close to the water, just above the flood zone, but they can walk up to 200 metres to find the right nesting spot. Many turtles can come out of the water to nest at the same time.

Eggs take 2-3 months to hatch and hatchlings have distinct orange or red spots on the underside of their shell (plastron).

## Threats

Many issues threaten eastern long-necked turtles. Some of the greatest threats are:

- Foxes digging up nests to eat the eggs and killing adult turtles on land, usually nesting females when they come out of the water to lay their eggs
- Reduced river flows and altered hydrology in wetlands
- Hatchlings being eaten by fish and birds
- Cars running over adults that are moving over land
- Poor water quality from salinity, turbidity and chemical run-off (from farms and towns).

## How can you help?

You can play a role in helping your local turtles by:

- Recording sightings and nesting locations using TurtleSAT
- Protecting nests from predators
- Volunteering with a local wetland group
- Looking out for turtles on the road in wet stormy conditions between October and January
- Keeping our waterways healthy by reducing soil and chemical run off and preventing litter from entering waterways
- Leaving snags in the water (or even re-snagging)
- Using turtle safe fish traps (ie not funnel traps) and leaving an air pocket for them to breathe.



Baby eastern long-necked turtle. Image: Adam Elliot



Underside of an eastern long-necked turtle. Image: Jules Farquhar



Cars are a threat to turtles. Image: 1 Million Turtles

## For more information

[landscape.sa.gov.au/mr](https://landscape.sa.gov.au/mr)

TurtleSat  
[turtlesat.org.au/turtlesat/](https://turtlesat.org.au/turtlesat/)

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