

Mary River turtle (*Elusor macrurus*)

Scientific Name: *Elusor macrurus*

Common Name: Mary River turtle

Conservation Status: Critically Endangered (*EPBC Act 1999*); Endangered (*QLD Nature Conservation Act 1992*); Endangered (IUCN Red List)

Distribution: Endemic to the Mary River.

Habitat: Flowing well-oxygenated freshwater sections of streams, preferring a combination of sand banks, riffles and deep pools containing submerged logs, rock crevices and aquatic plant cover. Generally they do not occur in impoundments. They are territorial with a home range up to a maximum of 2km.

Threats: One of Australia's largest and most unique turtles that is listed as **Critically Endangered to Extinction**. The turtle's population decline is due to extensive egg harvesting and high nest predation rates, mainly by the European red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*). Other factors include riparian and in-stream habitat loss and modification, reduced water quality and climate change.



Mary River turtle (*Elusor macrurus*) © Copyright, Marilyn Connell (from Tiaro & District Landcare Group)

Description: Large short necked turtle, with males reaching 43cm and females reaching 36cm in length. Adults have an elongated, streamlined carapace ranging in colour from rusty red to brown and almost black. The lower half of the shell can vary from cream to pale pink. Skin colouration is similar to the shell, but often with pink present on the tail and limbs. Large pointed barbles occur under the chin. They have a small head with very large hind feet and are very fast swimmers. Males have very large tail, up to two thirds the length of shell. It is a cloacal ventilator, meaning it takes in oxygen through its bottom.

Diet: Adult diet consists mostly of aquatic plants, mainly filamentous algae, and including Ribbon Plant (*Vallisneria sp.*), Milfoil (*Myriophyllum sp.*), roots, stems and bark. Juvenile turtle diet consists mostly of aquatic insect larvae.

Reproduction: Sexual maturity is reached at approximately 30 years for males and 20 years for females. Turtles nest on sparsely vegetated sandy riverbanks between October and January. Nesting is triggered by rainfall and usually occurs at night. Records indicate turtles demonstrate nest-site fidelity by returning to the same nesting site each year.

Importance of the nesting bank at The Sands: Critical habitat for the survival of the Mary River turtle is the rivers and streams of the Mary River catchment, particularly a well-oxygenated aquatic environment and sandy banks suitable for nesting. In the urban reach of the river, Mary River turtle nesting is concentrated on a small number of sand banks including at The Sands on the Mary River. The sand bank marked in yellow is a known Mary River turtle nesting bank, however Mary River turtles may nest elsewhere. Protecting this bank from disturbance between 1 October 2026 and 31 January 2027 aims to provide undisturbed suitable habitat for Mary River turtles to nest in. **Please do not enter or disturb this area, or let domestic dogs enter the area.**



PLEASE DO NOT DISTURB THIS AREA

PLEASE REPORT ANY DISTURBANCE TO MRCCC ON (07) 5482 4766

THANK-YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION

Mary River turtle nest protection at The Sands - prepared by MRCCC

September 2026