

# First recorded observation of the Chinese stripe-necked turtle *Mauremys sinensis* in Great Britain

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The international pet trade has facilitated the movement of numerous non-native reptile species into Europe, including various freshwater turtles. Feral terrapin populations are known throughout Great Britain (Allain, 2019), with many being unwanted pets which have been carelessly released into unsuitable habitats when their owners can no longer care for them. Previously undocumented species are occasionally observed (Cathrine & Monir, 2022), adding to the growing list of freshwater terrapin species within the region.

The Chinese stripe-necked turtle *Mauremys sinensis* is a semi-aquatic freshwater species native to parts of east and south-east Asia, including China, Taiwan and northern Vietnam (Jablonski et al., 2018). It inhabits slow-moving rivers, ponds, marshes and rice paddies, where it feeds on a varied diet of aquatic vegetation, invertebrates and small vertebrates (Wang et al., 2013). The species is diurnal and relies on both aquatic and terrestrial habitats for foraging and nesting. Previously widespread, *M. sinensis* has experienced significant population declines due to habitat loss, pollution and overexploitation for the pet trade, traditional medicine and consumption. As a result, it is classified as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List (Li et al., 2021).

On 25 May 2025 at approximately 11:45 h, an adult Chinese stripe-necked turtle *M. sinensis* was observed basking among the vegetation within a pond at Davy Down Riverside Park, Essex (51.497757, 0.291915) and observed again on 1 June at 13:10 h (Fig. 1). Due to the unseasonably dry weather, the pond had shrunk considerably making the *M. sinensis* considerably easier to spot. Another introduced species, the marsh frog *Pelophylax ridibundus* was also present in the pond. To our knowledge, this is the first observation of this *M. sinensis* in the wild in Great Britain.

A total of 2,333 *M. sinensis* were imported into the UK between 2009 and 2024, according to the CITES Trade Database (CITES Trade Database, 2025). These *Mauremys* species were chosen as an alternative within the pet trade as they were seen to be less environmentally damaging than *Trachemys* spp, yet could still be captive bred to meet the demands of the market. *Mauremys sinensis* has been recorded in multiple countries across Europe but as Great Britain has no native terrapin species, the impacts of species introduction are limited compared to elsewhere in Europe.



**Figure 1.** An adult Chinese stripe-necked turtle *Mauremys sinensis* observed at Davy Down Riverside Park, Essex in 2025

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