

Western Pond Turtle Fact Sheet

Phylum	Class	Order	Family	Genus	Species	Status
Chordata	Reptilia	Testudines	Emydidae	<i>Emys</i>	<i>E. marmorata</i>	Endangered in Washington state

Classification and Range

The western pond turtle belongs to a family Emydidae, which contains over 85 species of turtles. This is the largest family of turtles, with 30 genera. *Emys* is a genus of small- to medium-size turtles that inhabit aquatic, terrestrial and semiaquatic habitats. Western pond turtles range from the Puget Sound area of Washington through western Oregon and California to Baja California. It was once the only species of turtle found in the Puget Sound area, and was considered common before being declared endangered in Washington state in 1993.



Habitat

The western pond turtle is found from sea level to 4,500 feet (1375 m) in elevation. In Washington, they are only found up to 300 feet (100 m). They inhabit slow-moving streams, marshes, ponds, lakes and canals with muddy bottoms. During the heat of summer and in the cold of winter, many can be found on land burrowed under logs and leaf litter. Habitat alteration and destruction have contributed to the demise of the turtle in western Washington.

Life Span

Western pond turtles possibly live to be 50 years old.



Description

Adult pond turtles range from 6-8 inches (15-20 cm) in length and weigh 1-2.4 pounds (448-1100 g). Coloration ranges from brown to black on the carapace (the upper shell), with lighter marbling visible on close examination. The plastron (the lower shell) is black and yellow. The head and legs are also dark with possible yellow markings (not stripes). These turtles are very shy and will dive into the water at the least disturbance.

Diet

In the wild: Western pond turtles are opportunistic feeders. Food items include various insects, frogs and frog eggs, fish and carrion.

At the zoo: The turtles are fed mealworms, earthworms, waxworms, crickets, mice and some fish.

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Reproduction

Western pond turtles in Washington usually reach sexual maturity around 10-12 years of age. Mating in the wild takes place in the spring and possibly also in the fall. Nesting occurs from late May until the middle of July. Females find a suitable site, usually with dry soil, sparse vegetation and a southern exposure. A hole is dug by softening the soil with urine and then scooping out the soil alternately with hind feet. They will deposit a clutch of three to 13 eggs. After laying the eggs, the hole is filled with a mixture of vegetation and dirt to provide an air space, and covered with wet soil as a plug to keep the eggs in a humid environment. This process can take from two to four hours. Incubation takes 90-130 days, depending on summer temperatures.



Life Cycle

Hatchling pond turtles average 1-1.2 inch (2.5-3.1 cm) in length and weigh .011-.025 ounces (3-7 g). They may emerge from the nest in the fall or spend winter in the nest and come out in the spring. Hatchlings are independent and rely on their natural instinct for finding food. While spending much time hiding from many predators, most baby pond turtles are not able to survive the first year. Birds, fish and the introduced American bullfrog are among many predators of the small turtles.

Fascinating Facts

- From observing pond turtles foraging, biologists have found that western pond turtles swallow all their food in water and appear unable to swallow food in air!
- Western pond turtles are wary and shy. If disturbed, they will usually swim under rocks, logs or vegetation to hide!
- In 1990, many pond turtles in Klickitat County died from a disease similar to upper respiratory disease. Diseases such as this can be introduced into western pond turtle populations when nonnative turtles are released into the wild