



Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta* ssp.)

Cry-sem-ees pick-ta bell-ee and *Cry-sem-ees pick-ta mar-gin-ata*



Midland Plastron (left), Western Plastron (right)

Description: The painted turtle is a fairly small, semi aquatic turtle ranging from 4 to 9 inches carapace length. The carapace is smooth, and can be black, grayish, or olive green with red flecks along the marginals. The head, neck, and limbs are blackish to olive with yellowish, to reddish-orange stripes. Plastron color can vary from pale yellow or cream colored with a narrow central band to reddish-orange with a wider “oak leaf” pattern.

Taxonomy and Classification:

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Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Testudines

Suborder: Cryptodira

Family: Emydidae

Genus: *Chrysemys*

Species: *Chrysemys picta**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Similar/Confusing Species: Map turtles (*Graptemys sp.*) often tend to be larger, have serrated rear marginal scutes, and lines on the carapace and scutes resembling topographic maps. Pond sliders (*Trachemys scripta*) have weakly keeled rear marginal scutes, a weak dorsal keel on the carapace, and pale yellowish plastrons with variable amounts of dark, irregular markings.

Etymology: Chrysemys- Chrysos (gold) emys (freshwater tortoise). picta-pictus (painted or colored). belli-patronym for Thomas Bell (1792-1880). marginata (enclosed with a border).

Subspecies: Western painted turtle (*Chrysemys p. belli*) and Midland painted turtle (*Chrysemys p. marginata*). May intergrade as well.

Range & Habitat: Painted turtles are perhaps the most common and widespread turtle in Wisconsin, being found statewide. They prefer permanent to semi-permanent bodies of water including lakes, ponds, marshes, rivers, streams, and backwater sloughs.

Habits & Natural History: Painted turtles are frequently seen basking in numbers on emergent logs, rocks, and along shore banks, where they will dive into the water when disturbed. These turtles are omnivorous, feeding on algae and aquatic plants, small fish, aquatic insects, and other invertebrates. These turtles are often encountered moving over land and across roads from May to early July as females search for sandy areas to lay eggs.

Phenology: Painted turtles will begin emerging from overwintering and mating as early as early April through May, and remain active throughout the year through September or October (or sometimes even later in the year if warmer temperatures persist or otherwise permit). Many Wisconsin turtles begin moving over land and are often encountered during May through early July as they search for sandy nesting sites.

Conservation Status: WI Common with no special protections, but regulated by WI DNR. IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

<http://www.madisonherps.org>

Contact

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this species, group of species, or this informational sheet, please email and contact the Madison Area Herpetological Society at info@madisonherps.org

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