



*Mike Day

Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta* ssp.)

Painted Natives

Painted turtles are small to medium sized, semi-aquatic pond turtles indigenous to much of North America. These turtles have a blackish, gray, to olive somewhat streamlined carapace with reddish-orange flecks on the marginal scutes, and a pale yellowish to reddish orange plastron varying in color and pattern depending on the subspecies. Some subspecies may also have a reddish orange dorsal stripe. The head, neck, and limbs also have yellowish to reddish stripes as well. Common subspecies are the Midland Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta marginata*), Western Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta belli*), Eastern Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta picta*) and Southern Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta dorsalis*). As with many other emydid turtles, painted turtles are frequent baskers, and may often be seen basking during warm or sunny conditions on or along river or stream banks, submerged rocks, logs, or other debris, where they will usually quickly dive into the water if disturbed or approached too closely. They are also often among the most widespread and ubiquitous species of turtles over much of their range, occurring in nearly any permanent to semi-permanent bodies of water or other wetlands.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum/Sub Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Testudines

Suborder: Cryptodira

Family: Emydidae

Subfamily: Deirochelyinae

Genus: *Chrysemys*

Species: *Chrysemys picta**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Lifespan and Longevity

Painted turtles may attain longevity of 20 to 40 years or more with proper care and conditions.

Distribution and Habitat

Painted turtles are relatively small semi aquatic turtles indigenous from southern and southeastern Canada, through much of the eastern United States in most types of permanent to

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semi-permanent water bodies.

Conservation Status

IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate.

Size

Adult painted turtles usually reach a carapace, or upper shell length of 4 ½ to 9 inches, with females being larger than males.

Housing and Enclosure

Painted turtles are semi aquatic turtle species. Provide a sturdy, escape proof aquarium or commercially available plastic or galvanized stock tank or turtle tub of sufficient size with an elevated dock or basking area/access to dry land using a substrate dam. The latter are perhaps preferred for maintaining aquatic to semi-aquatic turtles in, as they are easier to clean, move/transport, and maintain than aquariums. Provide a minimum of 10 gallons of space per inch of shell, or about 40 to 90 gallons for most adult painted turtles. A general rule of thumb to follow for most aquatic to semi-aquatic turtles is to provide water that is at least 1 ½ to 2 times the turtle's height in depth to allow for complete submersion, and at least two to three times the carapace length for adequate swimming and movement. A powerful water filter rated at least twice that of the amount of water in the enclosure is highly recommended for aquatic turtles, as they are messy and require frequent cleaning and regular water changes. Use a submersible water heater with a guard to maintain water temperatures of 75 to 85 degrees F. Substrate is optional, and foregoing it makes for easier cleaning and maintenance, but small to medium sized gravel can be used. Additional rocks, logs, live or artificial foliage can also be provided for additional foraging, basking, and hiding opportunities.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Providing the correct amounts of UVA/UVB overhead incandescent and florescent lighting, and calcium-to-phosphorus ratios is essential for ensuring the health and overall well-being of painted turtles in captivity. Without UVA/UVB, or adequate amounts of it, they can be susceptible to the abnormal bone and shell growth and development known as Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD), and other health and development maladies. Pyramiding of the scutes and shell can also occur due to poor or improper diet, lighting, or heating. Always be sure to spot clean the enclosure for urates, feces, or uneaten food at least twice per week. Be sure to periodically replace the substrate, clean, and disinfect the enclosure and its furnishings at minimum every 2 to 3 months. Painted turtles require a thermal gradient using a ceramic or radiant heat emitter, UTH (or under tank heating pad), and UVA/UVB overhead lighting. Ambient and cool end temperatures should be within 70 to 80 degrees F and the basking area from 85 to 95 degrees F. Also be sure to maintain a light cycle of 12 to 14 hours per day, and monitor temperatures with a quality thermometer. Be sure to provide a basking area or platform for your turtle to emerge completely from the water as well. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Omnivorous to Carnivorous; In the wild, painted turtles are primarily omnivorous to carnivorous, feeding on aquatic to semi-aquatic insects, crustaceans, mollusks, and other invertebrates, as well as smaller vertebrates including small fish, amphibians, and carrion, or

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dead and decaying plant and animal material. Some algae and other aquatic plants may also be consumed. In captivity, variety is important with most aquatic to semi-aquatic turtle's diets. Painted turtles can be given feeder insects of appropriate size including crickets, roaches, mealworms, waxworms, superworms, or other invertebrates. They can also eat small, frozen-thawed rodents of appropriate size, but offer these sparingly, if at all. Other food items that will be accepted by these turtles can include many of the commercially available aquatic to semi-aquatic turtle or omnivore mix diets, small feeder fish of appropriate nutritional value, earthworms, redworms, freeze dried shrimp or krill, or some other meats. Dog and cat foods can also be used, but use these sparingly, if at all as well. They can also be fed some chopped greens, fruits, and vegetable material as well. Gutloading any feeder insects and providing additional calcium and vitamin D3 is essential for these turtle's optimal health and well-being. Without proper supplementation, they are susceptible to Metabolic Bone Disease, pyramiding of the shell, and other abnormal bone, growth, and health maladies. Feeding frequency will depend on the age, size, and overall health of your turtle, but typically in most cases should be twice to three times weekly. Do not overfeed them, though as obesity and other health related issues can become a concern. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Handling

Captive born and raised painted turtles can become very tame and personable pets, often even approaching their keepers for food. Most small to mid-sized turtle and tortoise species that are not aggressive or prone to biting can be picked up and handled either by placing both hands along both sides of the shell, or from the rear of the carapace with the thumb on the carapace and index through pinky fingers on the plastron to reduce the chances of being kicked, scratched, or nipped when they are threatened. Although most species of chelonians are not outwardly aggressive, defensive, or dangerous, they can become stressed as a result of over-handling, however, and some species, and even individual animals can be shy than others. These are some considerations to keep in mind when handling any chelonian species.

****Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens****

Contact

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

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