

TURTLES IN THE PORTLAND AREA

Native Turtles

Oregon is home to two native species of turtles: the Western Pond Turtle and the Western Painted Turtle. Both may be found in the Portland area, and are considered Special Status Species by the City. Both of them are highlighted in the Oregon Conservation Strategy as species in need of help—that is, they have low or declining populations. As adults, both turtles are 4-9 inches long and are slow to develop and reproduce. They eat plants, insects and tadpoles. Population declines are due to habitat loss, degradation of nesting areas by invasive plants, competition from non-native turtles and disease. Predators include raccoons and invasive bullfrogs and fish. Landowners can help by providing shallow wetland habitats, basking logs and open grassy nesting areas. Dogs should be kept away from known nesting places. Wire cages can protect nests from predation by raccoons.

Western Pond Turtle

(*Emmys marmorata marmorata*)

Characteristics: Relatively small head with fine dark blotches, flecks or lines; brown neck with dark flecks or lines; brown carapace, often with small dark markings; large, creamy to yellow plastron; relatively long, brownish tail (25-35% of carapace length).

Habitat: Pond turtles prefer marshes, streams, rivers, ponds and lakes. They need sparse vegetation nearby for digging nests and like to bask on logs. This turtle, which can live up to 50 years in the wild, is not fully aquatic; it may spend part of the year in upland forests.



Western Painted Turtle

(*Chrysemys picta bellii*)

Characteristics: Relatively small, black head with yellow lines; black neck with several thin yellow lines; dark green or greenish-black carapace without dark markings; large, bright reddish-orange plastron with large complex central figure; relatively short, black tail with yellow or red stripe laterally (10-15% of carapace length).

Habitat: Painted turtles need marshy ponds, small lakes, slow-moving streams, and quiet off-channel portions of rivers. They prefer waters with muddy bottoms with aquatic vegetation. Open ground for nesting and logs for basking help keep this species healthy. While hatchlings are only about the size of a quarter, individuals can live 20 years or more.



Non-native Turtles

Non-native turtles compete with native turtles for basking sites and are known to introduce disease to native turtle populations. The two species Oregon biologists are concerned about are snapping turtles and red-eared sliders. Both are indigenous to the eastern United States. Never buy or release either of these turtles in the wild—it's not only harmful to native species, but illegal. Call your local Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife office if you have one of these species or if you see one (503-657-2000).

Common Snapping Turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*)

Characteristics: Can reach up to 18" in length; neck is dark on top and on the sides, but is light and unmarked below; strongly serrated carapace, which varies from tan/brown to olive to almost black; very small, creamy-yellow plastron; tail is 33-50% of carapace length, and has three rows of saw-tooth keels.



Red-Eared Slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*)

Characteristics: This turtle is often mistaken for the native Western Painted Turtle. Relatively small dark green head with small yellow or white lines; carapace is green/olive with black and yellow lines; dark green neck with small yellow or white stripes, and a **bright red patch** just behind the eye; large, yellowish-white plastron with large central figure(s).



Definitions

Carapace: The upper shell of a turtle.

Plastron: The "plate-like" underside of a turtle.

Other Resources

<http://www.oregonturtles.com/>

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/species/reptiles/western_pond_turtle_habitat.asp

St. John, A. 2002. *Reptiles of the Northwest*. Lone Pine Publishing. Auburn, WA

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