



western painted turtle

Chrysemys picta bellii

Kingdom:	Animalia
Division/Phylum:	Chordata - vertebrates
Class:	Reptilia
Order:	Testudines
Family:	Emydidae

Features

A female western painted turtle is five to eight inches long, while the smaller male rarely exceeds 5 1/2 inches. Its smooth shell has a red, yellow, and black color pattern. An adult male has very long claws on its front feet. This turtle has yellow stripes on its head and dark coloring on the plastron (lower shell). The carapace (upper shell) of the hatchling is keeled (ridged).

Natural History

The western painted turtle is found in shallow water bodies with many aquatic plants and a muddy bottom. Typical locations include ponds, marshes, ditches, lakes, streams, and river pools. It eats plants, insects, crayfish, mollusks (snails, slugs, and others), fish, and amphibians. Although aquatic, the western painted turtle frequently is found on land. It is active during the day. The mating season lasts from April to June. The male courts the female in a ritual involving stroking her head with the back of the long claws on

his front feet. The female in turn strokes his front legs with her claws. After mating, the female digs a nest in soil a few feet from the edge of the water. Two to 20 eggs are deposited in the nest during the middle of the day. Hatchlings may be found after two to 2 1/2 months. If the eggs were laid late in summer, hatchlings may not emerge until spring.

Habitats

Mississippi River; Missouri River; interior rivers and streams; constructed lakes, ponds, and reservoirs; natural lakes and prairie marshes

Iowa Status

common; native

Iowa Range

statewide

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001. *Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats* CD-ROM.