

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND A WESTERN POND TURTLE



*Although western pond turtles are most vulnerable when they leave the water, they usually head for dry land with a purpose.*

Western pond turtles leave the safety of the water more often than you might think. Turtles come to land to nest; escape drying creeks and ponds or winter floods; hibernate; find mates; and to seek out new ponds and streams.

If you come across a healthy western pond turtle on dry land that is in no immediate danger, do not disturb it. Already skittish by nature, they are especially so on land, leading females to abandon nesting attempts. Make a point of leaving (and leave!) by walking away with heavy footsteps and loud voices. If you sneak off, the turtle may wait you out - leaving it vulnerable to predators or the elements. If you find a live turtle crossing a road, safely move it to the far side in the direction it was heading.

If you come across a western pond turtle that appears ill or has sustained recent injuries (e.g., from a pet, vehicle, or fishing tackle), carefully transport it in a covered container to a local wildlife rehabilitation center immediately. Note where you first discovered the turtle so it can be returned to the closest watershed. The California Department of Fish and Game maintains a list of authorized wildlife rehabilitation centers:

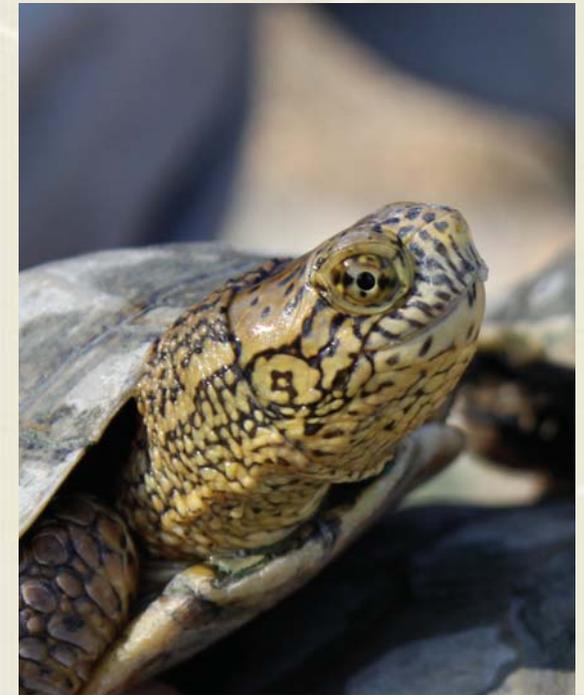
[<http://www.dfg.ca.gov/wildlife/rehab/facilities.html>].

Western pond turtle populations today are experiencing a decline. In years past, California's native turtle was collected for the San Francisco market's "terrapi trade" as an ingredient for soups and stews. Today, they face such threats as urban development, habitat degradation, wetland loss, non-native predators (bullfrogs, large-mouth bass), and pet owners releasing non-native turtles (e.g., red-eared sliders) in the wild.

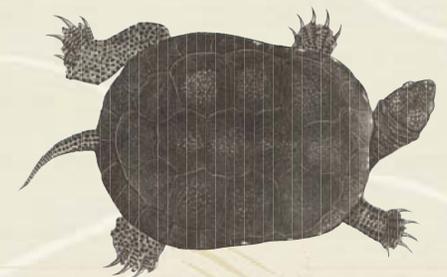


CA Dept. Fish & Game  
*\* Species of Special Concern \**  
OR Dept. Fish & Wildlife  
*\* Critical Species \**  
WA Dept. Fish & Wildlife  
*\* Endangered \**

## WESTERN POND TURTLE



(*CLEMMYS MARMORATA*)



## KNOW YOUR LOCAL TURTLE



*The elusive western pond turtle, the only turtle native to the Pacific Coast, was once a common inhabitant of wetlands.*

**Common Name:** western pond turtle

**Scientific Name:** *Clemmys marmorata*

**Coloration:** Olive, brown, or black with yellow; becomes drab with age

**Notable Markings:** Speckled/marbled carapace (upper shell), speckled skin

**Adult Carapace Length:** 6-8 inches (150-200 millimeters)

**Geographic Range:** Pacific Coast [British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, California, Baja California]



*Typical markings*

**Natural History:** The western pond turtle is the only turtle species native to the rivers, creeks, and ponds of the western Pacific Coast. This turtle is commonly seen basking on rocks and logs but, because of its timid nature, it retreats quickly at the sight of visitors. It subsists on a varied diet that includes aquatic insects, fish, worms, crustaceans, algae, and tule/cattail roots. Female turtles leave the water to nest between April and August, excavating pear-shaped nest chambers in the ground that can hold between 1 and 13 porcelain-white eggs. In 80 to 110 days, hatchlings emerge - some will leave the nest, others will overwinter in the nest chamber before heading to nearby waters in the spring.



## HOW YOU CAN HELP WESTERN POND TURTLES

One of the best ways to protect and conserve the western pond turtle is through proactive land stewardship. Whether you are a private landowner or a public land manager, here are some tips to help give California's native pond turtle a leg up:

### AQUATIC HABITAT:

Deep waters provisioned with submerged tree roots provide refugia so turtles can escape from predators, while shallow waters provide warm nursery grounds for hatchlings. Emergent features like tree falls, woody debris, rocks, or tules provide ideal basking habitat. In the absence of natural substrates, consider constructing basking platforms – rafts – anchored at depth on a swivel to keep them free-floating.



*Key habitat includes a mix of water depths and natural cover.*



*Basking sites are important for thermoregulation.*

### NESTING HABITAT:

Beginning in late spring through summer, female turtles leave the safety of their ponds and creeks to find a dry spot to dig a nest. Nesting habitat is typically located on sparsely vegetated, typically south- and west-facing slopes at distances of up to 500 feet from the water's edge. Ideal sites are free from artificial irrigation (sprinkler systems) because the western pond turtle's hard egg shells can explode when wet.



*A hatchling western pond turtle emerging from the nest.*



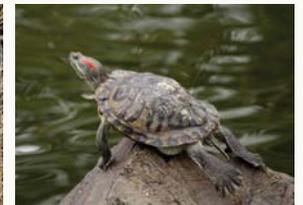
*Turtles come ashore to nest or escape from floods or dry spells.*

### INVASIVE SPECIES:

Urban predators like raccoons, skunks, and wild boar (feral pigs) are known predators of turtle nests and hatchlings. Unsecured garbage cans and outdoor feeding stations for pets attract and subsidize urban raccoon and skunk populations. Non-native species like bullfrogs, bass, and red-eared sliders eat or compete with native species, and can introduce and spread diseases. Such species should be removed from natural settings.



*Predators attracted to freshly-dug nests rarely leave live eggs behind.*



*A non-native red-eared slider - a likely escapee of the pet-trade.*