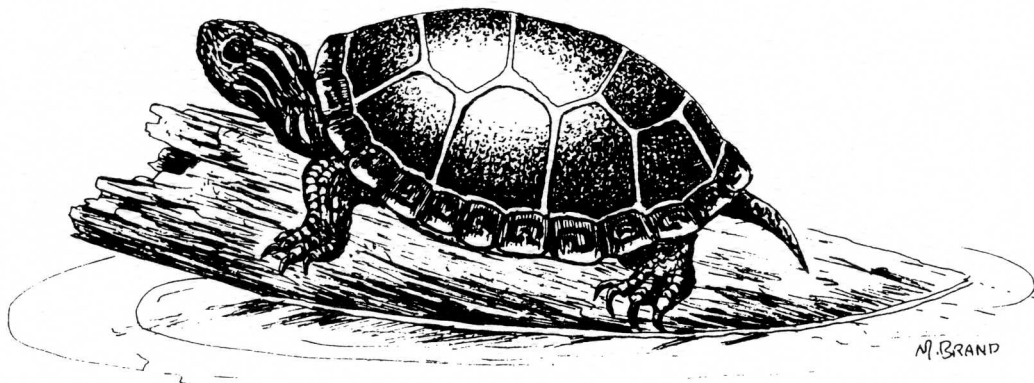


Naturalist Notebook

RIVER BEND NATURE CENTER

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Painted Turtle

Chrysemys picta

Walk by a pond on a warm, sunny day and you may notice some peculiar mounds on the logs or rocks above the water surface; these would likely be painted turtles basking in the sun. Basking is the most noticeable behavior in painted turtles. They bask to warm themselves so they can reach their highest level of efficiency in food gathering and predator awareness. Exposure to sun and air can also reduce the growth of algae on their shells and discourage leeches and other parasitic organisms from attaching.

The painted turtle species comprises four subspecies: eastern, midland, western and southern. They inhabit the widest range of any turtle species, from the eastern United States to the Pacific Northwest coast. Painted turtles have bright red and orange coloration along the edges of their shell (carapace); and on their neck, legs and head, yellow stripes with a conspicuous spot of yellow behind each eye. The females have larger shells than the males, but the males have much longer tails and claws. The males use

this to their advantage during periods of courtship, which take place at or just below the water surface. He will sweep his long limbs along the side of the female and if she accepts the invite, he'll take her to the bottom of the pond to mate.

Nests are built by the female, usually in an open area with lots of sunlight, some vegetation and nearby water. She will lay her eggs (typically about 6 per clutch), then cover the nest so it is barely noticeable. Many predators still locate the eggs, however, dig them up and eat them. If the eggs make it they will hatch after 2 ½ to 3 months, usually in August or September, although some hatchlings winter over in the nest and emerge the next spring. These hatchlings are 2.2-2.8 centimeters in shell length. The juvenile turtle is carnivorous but will become omnivorous as it matures. The lifespan of a painted turtle is at least 13-16 years in captivity but expected to be about 40 years in the wild.