



The Eastern Painted Turtle *Chrysemys picta*

The Painted Turtle is native to North America. There are 4 subspecies. Although similar, the subspecies differ slightly in shape and coloring. Each covers a large range, some of which are overlapping. The Eastern Painted Turtle subspecies range is from Nova Scotia to Alabama. They live in slow moving fresh water, ponds, lakes, streams, rivers and The Great Swamp. Turtles are among the longest-lived creatures on Earth and it is believed that they have been in existence for over 200 million years. Fossil evidence shows that the Painted Turtle itself existed at least 15 million years ago.

The adult female is an average of 4 to 10 inches long and weighs 18 ounces. The male is smaller at an average of 3 to 6 inches long and weighs 11 ounces. The shell of the turtle is its home; it is made up of many bones connected together covered with plates which make the shell strong. The top of the shell is called the carapace and the bottom is called the plastron. The top shell of the eastern turtle is olive to black in color with pale markings on the segments and red marks on the edges. The bottom shell is yellow. The skin on their head, neck, legs and tail is olive to black with stripes that range in color from yellow to red and orange. Their face has only yellow stripes. They have webbed feet with claws. Turtles can hear well, have a good sense of smell, and also have good vision.

Turtles are cold-blooded reptiles. They bask in the sun for warmth. They start at sunrise, emerging from the water to bask on a log for a few hours. They can be seen basking in large groups. A group of turtles is called a bale. They go back in the water to forage for food; they consume their prey in the water, and then return to a log to bask some more. This process is repeated a few times during the day. Their diet is made up of insects, algae vegetation, fish and amphibians. At night they return to the water to sleep.

During the winter they dig a burrow in the muddy bottom of the water and hibernate. In the northern part of their range they may hibernate from October to March. They have the ability to survive long winter months without oxygen until the spring, when they emerge.

Turtles mate in the spring and early summer. The female chooses a male and after mating she can store the sperm for more than one clutch of eggs. She chooses a sunny spot on land near the water to dig her nest and lay her eggs. She lays approximately 4 to 15 oval soft-shelled, flexible eggs. The eggs incubate for about 80 days before they hatch. The hatchling breaks out of its shell with what is called an egg tooth, which is part of their jaw. They depend on egg material for food. The hatchlings are independent and on their own at birth. They must make their way back to the water but if the weather is cold they may stay in the nest until the next spring. The Eastern Painted Turtle life span is 20-40 years.

Crows, chipmunks, squirrels, skunks, snakes and foxes prey upon eggs in the nest. Herons, snakes, weasels, bullfrogs, fish, muskrats, mink and raccoons prey on hatchlings. The adult's hard shell protects them but they do fall prey to raccoons, bald eagles, crows and ospreys. The turtle defends itself by kicking, scratching, biting and urinating. Other threats are habitat loss, pollution and climate change.

Conservation Status: Least Concern

Mythology:

In some cultures the Turtle is a symbol of Mother Earth and how she provides us with all that we need if take good care of Her.

Attributes of the Turtle are long life, patience, perseverance, being open to new ideas and opportunities and letting them develop slowly with balance, slowing down, and enjoying life,

