



# WESTERN POND TURTLE

Testudines  
Family: Emydidae  
Genus: *Actinemys (Emys)*  
Species: *marmorata*



**Range** Puget Sound area through the Pacific coast states into Baja, California.

**Habitat:** slow moving water such as freshwater ponds, lakes, streams, and permanent wetlands from sea level to 5,000 feet

**Niche:** mainly aquatic, omnivorous, mainly diurnal

**Wild diet:** plants, small fish or frogs and aquatic insects and larvae.

**Zoo diet:**

**Life Span:** (Wild) 50 years  
(Captivity)

**Sexual dimorphism:** Males have concave plastron, lighter throat and a longer tail than females.

**Location in SF Zoo:** California Conservation Corridor

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## APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

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The Western Pond Turtle is a medium-sized turtle. It has an olive or brown colored carapace with a network of radiating brown or black lines on its scutes. The carapace is smooth, fairly flat and keelless. Its limbs and head range from yellow to brown or olive with darker flecks. The plastron is pale yellow often with black blotches on margins of scutes. Males have a concave plastron, lighter throat and a longer tail than do females.

**Weight:** 1 – 2.4 lbs

**Length:** 5.5 – 8.5 in

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## STATUS & CONSERVATION

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Western pond turtles are listed as Endangered in Washington and threatened in Oregon.

In May 2002, the Canadian Species at Risk Act listed the Pacific pond turtle as being extirpated in Canada. As of 2007, they have become rare or absent in the Puget Sound area.

Threats habitat destruction and fragmentation, the pet trade, vehicular slaughter and predation from introduced species. The biggest threat to the species is the bullfrog and introduced warm fresh water fish, such as bass. Both prey on juvenile turtles.

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## COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

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They favor habitats with large numbers of emergent logs or boulders, where they "haul out" and aggregate to bask. They also bask on top of aquatic vegetation or position themselves just below the surface where water temperatures are elevated. Individuals display aggressive behavior toward one another while sunning. These turtles are very shy and will dive into the water at the least disturbance and will seek refuge in deep water, under submerged logs and rocks, in beaver burrows and lodges, and by "swimming" into deep silt.

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## COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

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Western pond turtles breed in mid to late spring and possibly in the fall. Mating takes place underwater. Nesting occurs usually with dry soil, sparse vegetation and a southern exposure and about 100 yards from water. A hole is dug by softening the soil with urine and then scooping out the soil alternately with hind feet. Females deposit a clutch averaging 6 eggs in the soil. After laying the eggs, the hole is filled with a mixture of vegetation and dirt to provide an air space, and covered with wet soil as a plug to keep the eggs in a humid environment. This process can take from two to four hours. Incubation takes from 80 to 130 days after which the turtles hatch. The temperature the eggs were incubated at determines the gender of the hatchling. Warm nests make females and cooler ones make males.

The hatchling turtles average only 1 to 1.2 inches in length. The fully formed turtles survive on the yolk sac which they slowly absorb as they grow. When the temperatures drop in the fall, the hatchlings enter a state of hibernation in the nest. Hatchlings leave the nest when they are about the size of a quarter, and will live in shallow water. Hatchlings are independent and rely on their natural instinct for finding food. While spending much time hiding from many predators, most baby pond turtles are not able to survive the first year.

Incubation: 80 – 130 days	length at birth: 1 – 1.2 in
# of eggs: 5 - 13	Sexual Maturity: 10 – 12 years or > 6 in

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## MISCELLANEOUS

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Western pond turtles are the only freshwater turtle native to California.

Western pond turtles only swallow food under water, although it is not understood why.

During winter, turtles hibernate in mud at the bottom of ponds, or buried on land in duff (top layer of vegetation and soil).

### Sources:

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<http://www.oregonzoo.org/>

[http://www.dfw.state.or.us/wildlife/living\\_with/docs/turtles.pdf](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/wildlife/living_with/docs/turtles.pdf)

<http://www.zoo.org/>

Turtles of the World © 1992 Carl H. Ernst and Roger W. Barbour, Smithsonian Institute Press, p 192