



All About Michigan

Michigan's State Reptile, The Painted Turtle

The painted turtle is Michigan's State Reptile since 1995. They are the only turtle still commonly found in Michigan. The other turtles native to Michigan are Blanding's turtles, snapping turtles, musk turtles, spotted turtles, wood turtles, eastern box turtles, common map turtles and eastern spiny softshell turtles. It is disputed as to whether or not the red-eared slider turtle is native to Michigan.

Fossils show that the painted turtle existed 15 million years ago, but four regionally based subspecies evolved during the last ice age.

The adult painted turtle female is 4 to 10 inches long and the male is smaller. Their top shell is smooth and oval without a keel or ridge on the top. Its skin is olive to black with red, orange or yellow stripes on its extremities.

They live in ponds, lakes, marshes and slow-moving rivers that have soft, muddy bottoms.

The painted turtle eats aquatic vegetation, algae, and small

water creatures including insects, crustaceans and fish. Turtles don't have teeth, but instead have horny ridges that are serrated and sharp on their upper and lower jaws.

Their shell protects them from most predators. Though they are frequently consumed as eggs or hatchlings by rodents, canines and snakes. Raccoons, otters, mink and foxes (and other medium sized animals) will prey on turtles. The painted turtle keeps a watch out for predators and seek refuge in the water at the first sign of dan-



ger. For protection, they can quickly retract their head and legs into their hard shell.

The turtle relies on warmth from its surroundings. The painted turtle is active only during the day when it lays in the sun for hours on logs or rocks. During the winter, the turtle hibernates usually in the muddy bottoms of waterways. Adults in the wild can live for more than 55 years.

The breeding season lasts from late spring to early summer. Painted turtles are amniotes which require females to nest on land. The females prefer soft, sandy soil with good exposure to the sun for their nest area. The nests are dug with their hind feet. The females will lay 4 to 15 oval, soft shelled eggs in the hole in the ground.

Tales of Algonquian tribes have the colorful turtle playing the part of a trickster. Today, habitat loss and road killings have reduced the turtle's population, but its ability to live in human disturbed settings has helped it remain the most abundant turtle in North America.

Did you know?

- Turtles shed their shell as they're growing; this skin resembles a burnt leaf.
- Painted turtles can swim underwater.
- A group of turtles is called a 'a bale of turtles'.
- Painted turtles sleep underwater, buried in the sand or mud at the bottom of their habitat. They can breathe air and also absorb oxygen in water.
- A painted turtle shell is made of bone and is connected to the spine and ribs.
- Turtles have no vocal chords, but they can sometimes make hissing sounds.

