



# All About Michigan

## Michigan's Painted Turtle

The painted turtle was designated the official state reptile of Michigan in 1995. The painted turtle is the only turtle still commonly found in Michigan (of the nine or ten native species that live in this state). The other turtles native to Michigan are Blanding's turtle, the snapping turtle, musk turtle, spotted turtle, wood turtle, eastern box turtle, common map turtle, and eastern spiny softshell turtle.

The painted turtle is the most widespread native turtle of North America. This turtle lives in ponds, lakes, marshes, and in slow-moving rivers that have soft, muddy bottoms. Fossils show that the painted turtle existed 15 million years ago. Four regional based subspecies evolved during the last ice age. They are the eastern, midland, southern and western.

The adult painted turtle female is 4 to 10 inches long and the male is smaller. Males have very long front claws, used to tickle females during courtship. The turtle's top shell is dark and smooth - without a ridge. Its skin is olive to black in color with red, orange or yellow stripes on its extremities. The subspecies can be distinguished by their shells - the eastern has straight aligned top shell segments - the midland has a large gray mark on the bottom shell - the southern has a red line on the top shell and the western has a red pattern on the bottom shell.

The 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. Although they are frequently consumed as eggs or hatchlings by rodents, ca-



nines and snakes, the adult turtles hard shells protect them from most predators. For protection, they can quickly retract their head and legs into their hard shell. They rely on warmth from their surroundings. The painted turtle is active only during the day when it sunbathes for hours on logs or rocks.

During the winter months, the turtle hibernates, usually in the mud at the bottom of water bodies. Females dig nests on land and lay eggs between late spring and mid-summer. Hatched turtles grow until maturity, 2 to 9 years for males and 6 to 16 years for females.

Loss of habitat and road killings have reduced the population but, its ability to live in human disturbed settings has helped it remain the most abundant turtle in North America. Adults in the wild can live for more than 55 years!

### 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'.
- They are diurnal; at night they sleep at the bottom of the pond.
- Painted turtles can carry salmonella, a contagious bacterial disease that affects the human intestines. Hence, maintaining cleanliness and hygiene after handling a turtle is important.

