

Painted Turtles and the Department of Defense

The Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta*) is one of the most widespread and abundant species of turtle in the U.S. and Canada. As many as 50 individual turtles of this species have been seen basking on a single log. These turtles live in freshwater lakes, ponds, and marshes, and in many areas spend winter months buried in the thick mud layer of these wetlands hibernating.

Description: Adult Painted Turtles have a relatively flat, smooth top shell (carapace) that is typically 4.5–8 inches (11.5–20 cm) in length. The carapace is olive to black in color with a red border along the bridge to the lower shell (plastron), which is yellow with black or red to brown blotches. The head, neck, legs, and tail have yellow and red stripes. Females are larger than males.

Range: Painted Turtles range in North America from southern Canada to northernmost Mexico. However, they are absent from most of the



southern United States between Alabama and California, except in the Pecos and upper Rio Grande River drainages, and where they have been introduced by humans. Three subspecies are recognized (a fourth subspecies that occurs in the lower Mississippi River and Mobile Bay drainages has since been elevated to full species status).

Habitat: Painted Turtles are found in lakes, ponds, marshes, ditches, and river pools. They may also occur in slow moving streams and opportunistically colonize seasonally flooded wetlands. Aquatic vegetation provides cover and food for these turtles while in the water, and logs and other floating debris provides basking habitat.

Behavior: Painted Turtles are generally active from March through October. Their breeding season ranges from late spring to early summer. During mating, the male strokes the face of the female with his claws. Females lay 4 to 15 oval, soft-shelled eggs in the early summer. Painted Turtles bask in large numbers on the banks of wetlands or logs and other objects in the water. Basking helps to rid them of parasites. These turtles are omnivorous, eating plants and small animals (fish, carrion, insects, and aquatic crustaceans).

Military Interactions: A common turtle species on military lands. They are active during the day, and may be seen basking on logs in wetland sites or found crossing roads or trails while traveling from ponds or nesting sites.

Conservation Status: The Painted Turtle has no Federal or State conservation status, has a NatureServe ranking of G5-Secure, and is listed as Least Concern by the IUCN Red List. In Canada they have been placed on the Federal Blue List, vulnerable to human activities and natural events, but are not immediately threatened.

Threats/Planning Considerations: Threats to this species include road mortality, predation of eggs, young, and adults by raccoons and other predators, collection for pet trade, and destruction of freshwater habitats. Impacts to this species should be considered prior to the alteration of any small lake, pond, or seasonally flooded area on a DoD facility.



Picture by Seth Berry

Occurrence on Military Lands

Confirmed	Potential
Confirmed present on 102 military properties (21 Air Force; 54 Army; 2 Marine Corps; and 25 Navy).	Up to an additional 81 military properties (19 Air Force; 40 Army; 2 Marine Corps and 20 Navy).

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