



Effie Yeaw Nature Center

Reptile & Amphibian Residents of the Nature Center

Tahoe the Western Pond Turtle

Personal History:

In the summer of 2006, Tahoe was found and anonymously dropped off at a local State of California Department of Fish and Game office. He obviously had been in captivity previous to being abandoned. Because the Nature Center has a special permit to care for wild animals, Fish and Game contacted the Nature Center to see if we could offer this turtle a home. As luck would have it, we did have an artificial pond waiting for an inhabitant. If you drop by in the summer you might see Tahoe swimming in his tank, or if it is winter you may have to look a little closer to spot him under the sand.



Natural History: Western Pond Turtle (*Clemmys marmorata*)

Description: The length of the turtle ranges from 3 ½ to 7 ½ inches long. The carapace (part of the shell covering the back of the turtle) is fairly flat. It is olive, dark brown, or blackish. The plastron (part of the shell covering the stomach of the turtle) is usually yellowish with black or brown blotching. Six pairs of shields make up the plastron. Obvious scales cover the limbs. The shell of a male turtle is usually flatter than a female's.

Habitat: The Western Pond Turtle prefers to live in ponds, streams, irrigation ditches, rivers, marshes with a rocky or muddy bottom - places that have lots of aquatic vegetation such as watercress, water lilies, and cattails. They can also be found in pastures, woods and open forests. Their range covers from southwest British Columbia to northwest Baja California, from sea level to 6,000 feet elevation. They may be seen from February to November in the north and all year in the south.

Food: Aquatic plants, insects, worms, fish and carrion.

Reproduction: Three to eleven eggs are laid on shore, not far from the water, from May to August, depending on the locality. Nests are dug in the ground. After eight to ten weeks, turtle hatchlings about one inch long emerge and are on their own right from the start.

Den Behavior: These turtles are seen during the day, basking in the sun on logs, mud banks and cattail mats. Several may share the same area. When disturbed they slip into

the water and disappear. When in danger, this turtle can pull all its extremities into the shell and be protected from predators trying to eat it. They can also stay under water for up to five minutes to hide from enemies.

Other Information: The western pond turtle is the only native turtle in the Central Valley. It must now compete for habitat with non-native red- or yellow-eared sliders that have been released into waterways. The western pond turtle is considered a species of special concern to wildlife agencies because it is disappearing along with most of its natural habitat. It is illegal to remove them from the wild.