

# Western Painted Turtle

## IDENTIFICATION GUIDE

The **Western Painted Turtle** (*Chrysemys picta bellii*) is native to B.C. Two populations are recognized. The Pacific Coast population, found on southeastern Vancouver Island, some Gulf Islands and the Pacific Coast mainland, is designated as **Endangered**. The Intermountain-Rocky Mountain population found in interior B.C. is designated as **Special Concern**.

The **Western Painted Turtle** is difficult to tell apart from an introduced turtle, the Slider (*Trachemys scripta*). The Slider has been introduced into many areas of southern B.C. including Vancouver Island, Fraser Valley, and the Okanagan. Most Sliders are “released” pets. From a distance Sliders and Western Painted Turtles appear similar and are easily mistaken for one another because:

- they occupy similar freshwater habitats and both bask on floating logs in ponds or lakes;
- they are active at similar times of the year (April – September);
- they are similar in size although Sliders grow larger, reaching 28 cm (11”) compared to Western Painted Turtles which grow to 25 cm (9.8”);
- their upper shells (carapace) are similar in colour, ranging from blackish green to olive (young turtles appear lighter but as the turtles age their shell darkens);

- the shape of the shell can also appear similar although Painted Turtle’s carapace looks smoother and flatter.

The two turtles can best be identified by the **colour of their underside** (plastron). The underside of the Painted Turtle is red or orange while that of the Slider is yellow. Both species often have black markings on the plastron. It is, however, often difficult to see the plastron and it is recommended not to disturb the turtles by catching them. Instead, use binoculars to look for the characteristic **red ear mark** of the Slider behind the eye. Sometimes this mark may be yellow so look for other clues to confirm your identification, specifically colours on the side below the carapace or glimpses of the plastron (see ID key). If turtle does not appear to be either a Painted Turtle or a Slider, it may be the native Western Pond Turtle, or another introduced turtle. Several other species, including the Common Snapping Turtle and Asian Pond Turtle have also been introduced to B.C.



Western Painted Turtle range in B.C.



Slider



Slider range in B.C.

Native turtles are protected under the B.C. *Wildlife Act* and may not be held in captivity without a permit. Please do not release aquarium pets into the wild, they are harmful to our native species.

# Identification Key

## Western Painted Turtle



KIP LADAGE

No red mark behind eye

**EAR MARK** Does turtle have a red mark behind the eye?  
Note: Both species have thin yellow stripes on head, neck, legs and tail.

YES

NO



JIM HARDING

Bright red or orange with a central black and yellow pattern radiating out to sides

**UNDERSIDE (PLASTRON)** Is the plastron pale yellow with darker blotches?  
Note: Sometimes Sliders do not have darker markings.

YES

NO



MILDRED MCPHEE

Red vertical bars underneath

**SHELL (CARAPACE) BORDER** Underside of shell lacks red bars?

YES

NO



KATHY PAGE

Unkeeled (flat)  
Smooth appearance  
Faint yellow lines between scutes

**CARAPACE APPEARANCE** Does the shell appear rough, and more domed than flat?  
Note: Older painted turtles can also look rough.

YES

NO

What you saw was most likely a **Western Painted Turtle**

## Slider



JOHN WHITE

Red mark behind eye  
Sometimes ear mark is yellow



JOHN WHITE

Pale yellow usually with dark blotches



CHRISTIAN ENGLESTOFT

No red bars underneath shell



JIM HARDING

Weakly keeled (ridge down middle)  
Rough appearance  
Dark lines or swirls, sometimes with patches of white, red or yellow

What you saw was most likely a **Slider**



We want to hear about your turtle sightings. Please take a photo, write down the date and time you saw the turtle, and make a detailed description of the location (latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates are helpful), and email your sighting to [BCFrogwatch@Victoria1.gov.bc.ca](mailto:BCFrogwatch@Victoria1.gov.bc.ca) or mail to:

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