

Cold Eggs are Boys and Hot Eggs are Girls

On March 18, 2008, the western painted turtle became the Colorado State Reptile. Like several other symbols, the official designation was influenced by the participation of Colorado school children and their teachers in the legislative process. In 2007, a student in Jay Baichi's 4th grade class at Skyline Vista Elementary noticed there was no state reptile. Horatio Duarte and his classmates researched Colorado reptiles. They decided that the painted turtle was the most representative species. The turtle lives in all parts of the state and is colorful, just like Colorado. The students did not want a venomous snake to be the state symbol. They wanted a harmless, kid-friendly reptile.

Painted turtles need to be near water so that they can eat.

When turtles eat, they do not chew their food. They don't have any teeth! Instead, they use their beaks to slice and hold the food. Their tongues do not move freely and they cannot manipulate food well on land. So, they hold their food in the water use their strong throat muscles to gulp it down.

Painted turtles have a varied diet. Young painted turtles are carnivorous and eat mostly maggots, larvae, and beetles. As they mature, they eat plants, snails, insects, crayfish, leeches, tadpoles, and small fish. Painted turtles are prey for larger animals. Raccoons, otters, martens, and foxes are some of the predators that eat turtles and their eggs. Painted turtles dive quickly at the first

hint of danger. They can also retract their head and legs into the protection of their shell.

Where and when can people see painted turtles? In Colorado, turtles usually hibernate during the winter months by burrowing into the mud. They are active the rest of the year. During the day, painted turtles like to bask in the sun. Sometimes as many as 50 turtles bask on one log, stacked on top of each other. The sunning helps the turtles get rid of parasites like leeches.

Here's a really fun fact to know about the new state reptile. These reptiles lack sex chromosomes. The sex of the painted turtle is determined by the temperature of the eggs during a certain time in the embryo's development! Low temperatures during incubation produce males and high temperatures produce females.

