

# Spotted Turtle

*Clemmys guttata*

**Spotted turtles** live in a diverse array of shallow wetlands habitats in the eastern U. S. from New England down to northern Florida, and are also found in a few northern states of the Midwest. In many parts of their range scientists believe that populations of spotted turtles are declining, primarily because of habitat destruction and collecting of turtles for the pet trade. Many of the habitats that spotted turtles inhabit are small, shallow wetlands that are not well protected from human disturbance—as the wetlands are destroyed, habitat is lost, and spotted turtle populations disappear.

**Compared to** many heat-loving reptiles, spotted turtles are unusually active during cool seasons. In South Carolina, most spotted turtle sightings are in February and March. Turtles are active during daytime, when they are out looking for food or basking. The reproductive season is generally in mid- to late spring, and females will dig their nests and lay eggs sometime between May and July. Female spotted turtles usually lay from three to five eggs; large females may lay up to 11 eggs.

**Hatchling spotted turtles** that are lucky enough not to be eaten by a predator may mature in 7-10 years when they are approximately 3¼ inches long. Wild spotted turtles in Pennsylvania are known to live at least 30 years.



**Some animals** live up to their names better than others (ever wondered about red-bellied woodpeckers?). If you've seen a spotted turtle, you probably guessed its name correctly. Although some hatchlings and very old adult turtles are "spotless," most individuals are easily recognized by their bright yellow spots. Male spotted turtles often have brown eyes and a tan chin; females have orange eyes and a yellow chin.



**Although spotted turtles** are aquatic, during some parts of the year they spend considerable time on land, such as when they overwinter, or move from wetland to wetland, or when females lay eggs. Some females will actually return to the same terrestrial location year after year to lay their eggs. Spotted turtles are a good example of one of the many "wetland" species that also requires suitable terrestrial habitat if populations are to persist.



*This information is provided by Savannah River Ecology Laboratory Outreach and SPARC. For more information, call (803) 725-0156.*

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**By David Scott**