

EUROPEAN POND TURTLE

SCIENTIFIC NAME: **Emys orbicularis**

CONSERVATION STATUS: **Near Threatened**

FACT FILE

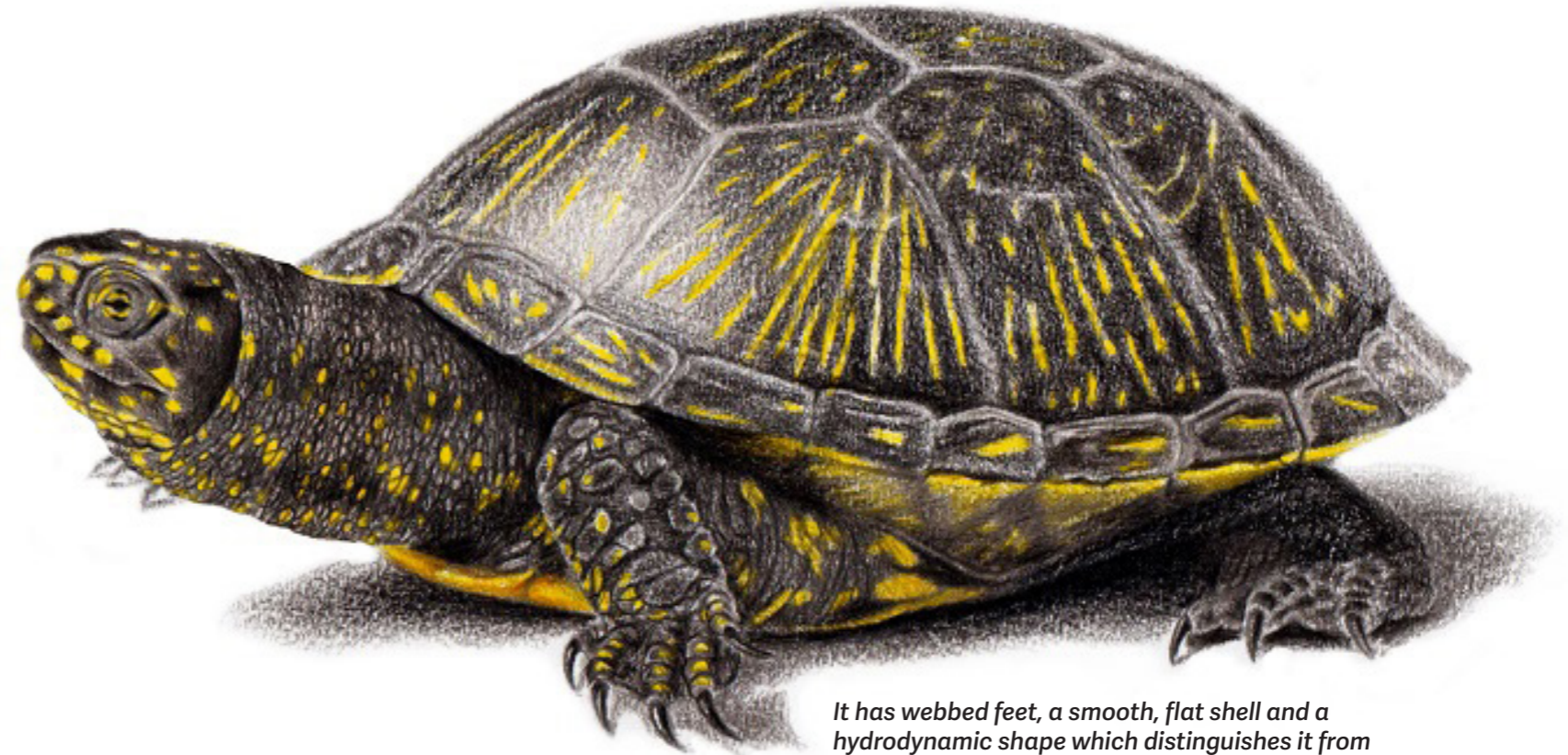
- CLASS: REPTILIA
- ORDER: TESTUDINES
- FAMILY : EMYDIDAE
- LIFE SPAN : UP TO 50 YEARS
- SIZE & WEIGHT : 11 - 19 CM (WITHOUT TAIL), UP TO 1 KG
- INCUBATION : ~ 3 MONTHS
- EGGS: 4 – 18
- HABITAT : LAKES & MARSHES
- DIET : CARNIVORE - INSECTS AND SMALL VERTEBRATES
- NATIVE REGION : EUROPE



The European pond turtle lives in quiet, sunny freshwater wetlands, such as marshes, lakes, ditches, slow-moving rivers and canals and it can also live in streams as in the Plaine des Maures (Var). It loves muddy bottoms and abundant aquatic vegetation which provide plenty of food and shelter. Its territory can cover almost 10 hectares. It actively seeks out floating tree trunks and low-hanging tamarisk branches on the river banks on which it can bask in the sunshine.

Breeding takes place between spring and early summer. Females lay their eggs on land, typically near a water body. Once the location of the nest is established, females spend time for the construction of the nest, laying of the eggs, and closing the nest which can take up to another 4 hours. The clutch contains 4 to 18 eggs and the incubation period lasts approximately 90-100 days. Once the eggs are laid the females bury their nests and leave; they don't participate in raising their young. Baby turtles hatch fully developed; they are independent at birth and become reproductively mature at 5-6 years of age.

They are considered semi-aquatic; their terrestrial movements can span 1 km and are occasionally found traveling up to 4 km away from the water. They are social and live in small groups. During the day they are often seen basking for many hours on stones, logs, or banks. If disturbed they quickly return to the water where they scan the area with just the nose and eyes emerged above the surface and often hide in floating vegetation. These turtles can remain underwater for many hours before they return to the surface. During cold months of the year, pond turtles hibernate burying themselves in the mud, and usually appear only in late spring.



It has webbed feet, a smooth, flat shell and a hydrodynamic shape which distinguishes it from land tortoises.

They have become rare in most countries even though they are widely distributed in Europe. The building of roads and driving of cars through natural habitats is a possible factor that threatens the populations of the European pond turtle. Road networks and traffic often carry complex ecological effects to animal populations such as fragmenting natural habitats and creating barriers for animal movement. Climate also has an effect. The young are only able to survive under favourable weather conditions, but due to regular annual clutch sizes and long lifespan, adult European pond turtles, balance out the loss of hatchlings due to climate pressures. Introduced exotic species such as Red-eared slider, known commonly as Florida turtles, put them in danger because they are bigger and heavier, therefore can outcompete them for food.