

Michigan's Most Endangered Turtle Survives in the Waterloo Rec. Area



This beautiful, diminutive *spotted turtle* has a maximum shell length of a little over 5 inches. This is Michigan's rarest turtle, with only isolated

populations remaining in the state. It is listed as a threatened species in Michigan and is protected by the Endangered Species Act.

The primary reasons for the spotted turtle's decline are loss of habitat and illegal collecting for the pet trade. It is now unlawful to collect or possess a spotted turtle in Michigan.

Spotted turtles require small bodies of clean, shallow water with soft or muddy bottoms and some emerging vegetation. These environments are found in the small ponds, bogs, fens, marshes and wet meadows still common in the Waterloo Recreation Area.

Spotted turtles are one of the earliest to become active in the spring, emerging soon after the ice and snow melt in March. In early spring they spend a great deal of time basking on logs, muskrat houses or other objects protruding above the water. During the warm summer months they escape the heat by

burying themselves in the mud. Therefore they are very unlikely to be seen in summer. Females lay their eggs in June, usually in the evening after the heat of the day. The young hatch in August or September. Most nests succumb to predation from raccoons and skunks, so the percentage that survive is very small. Fortunately, once they are full grown, spotted turtles may live over 30 years in the wild. This is why it is so important that the adults not be collected, as they cannot contribute to the future of their species if they are locked away in someone's aquarium.

Hopefully, through continued protection of its habitat in places like Waterloo and Pinckney Recreation Areas, the population of this beautiful turtle will avoid further decline.