

Bushy Lake Turtle Research

Female turtles on the lower American River are currently nesting in upland habitats. The turtles' movements between aquatic and terrestrial habitats make them highly susceptible to vehicle and bicycle strikes along the American Parkway Trail and Bushy Lake Restoration site.

Turtles at Bushy Lake have been observed nesting between late April and the end of July. Turtles travel up to 2 kilometers (1.24 miles) away from the water to nest and lay their eggs. While all turtles on the Parkway face the risk of collision, the Western pond turtles (*Actinemys marmorata*) are especially vulnerable to risks from human activity and collisions with vehicles. The Western pond turtle is the only native freshwater turtle in California, is listed as a reptile species of special concern, and is undergoing review for protection under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (Thomson, Wright, and Shaffer 2016; USFWS 2015).

If any turtles are seen in the field or along the parkway, follow these steps to ensure the turtles' safety:



1. Leave the turtle alone and give them at least 100ft of space;
2. If you observe a potential or direct risk to the turtle, such as being in the middle of the road or bike trail, try to gently encourage the turtle to move to a safer place in the same direction it was heading. *Avoid picking up the turtle*; handling a turtle can scare them. Turtles may urinate, lose their water, and be unable to finish laying eggs. She will need to return to the water to “fill up” to make another nesting attempt.
3. If you believe the turtle is a Western pond turtle, maintain your distance, take the best picture you can, and provide information to the Bushy Lake Citizen Science Turtle Monitoring research program. Do not disturb or handle the turtle. Email bushylake.ca@gmail.com.

How to identify the Western Pond Turtles and Red Eared Sliders

Western Pond Turtle (Native)



Western pond turtles (*Actinemys marmorata*) are characterized by their nearly uniform brown, dark brown, or black upper shell (carapace). They often bask with an outstretched neck, and the face and neck are cream colored with dark markings. The outer scutes along the rear edges of their carapace have a smooth edge and are not serrated.

Red-Eared Slider (Non-Native)



Red-eared sliders (*Trachemys scripta elegans*) are characterized by their colorful, distinctive markings. They have two red stripes behind each eye. Their upper shell (carapace) and skin are olive or brown in color and have a mottled pattern. Their bottom shell (plastron) is most commonly yellow. The outer scutes along the rear edge have a serrated edge.