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Field notes: Chrysemys picta picta

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Field Notes

***Chrysemys picta picta* (Eastern Painted Turtle).** VA: Accomack Co., Onancock, 24365 Nancock Gardens Rd., ca. 0.85 km N jct. Co. Rt. 638 and Nancock Gardens Rd. 11 June 2001 and 16 April 2002. Walter E. Carlson, Timothy R. Brophy, and Timothy W. Brophy.

According to Mitchell (1999. Checklist and keys to the amphibians and reptiles of Virginia's Eastern Shore. *Catesbeiana* 19: 3-18), all herpetofaunal observations from Virginia's Eastern Shore should be recorded in field notes and made available to the scientific community. On 11 June 2001 at 0800 h, we found a female *Chrysemys p. picta* sitting on a freshly dug nest cavity containing eggs. The turtle was examined briefly and returned to its position over the cavity, at which time we left the area. When we returned at 0845 h, the nest was covered and the female gone.

The nest was discovered in a wiregrass lawn approximately 15 m from the edge of Onancock Creek (Southern Branch), a brackish tidal creek. It was dug in hard soil on a SE facing slope (approximately 25° from horizontal) that receives full sun until late afternoon. The weather was clear and sunny with a daily mean temperature of 23.5° C (Accomack County Airport, Melfa, VA).

At 1315 h that afternoon, we carefully excavated the nest and measured all eggs with dial calipers. Six elliptical, flexible, cream-colored eggs were discovered. They averaged (mean \pm 1 SD) 30.1 ± 0.9 mm (29.2-31.4 mm) in length and 17.7 ± 0.3 mm (17.3-18.1 mm) in width. The bottom egg was found at a depth of approximately 10 cm. Once measured, the eggs were returned to the cavity as found and the nest was recovered. The nest was monitored daily over the next 10 months to watch for the emergence of hatchlings.

On the morning of 16 April 2002, 309 days after the eggs were laid, four *C. p. picta* hatchlings were found emerging from the nest. The hatchlings had round black shells and large yellow spots behind each eye. Mean carapace length for three of the hatchlings was 29.3 ± 1.4 mm (28.5-31.0 mm). The weather was clear and sunny with a daily mean temperature of 25.5° C. A warming trend was apparent in the area, with mean temperatures rising 12° C over the previous week (Accomack County Airport, Melfa, VA).

Field Notes

Nesting on nearby Chincoteague and Assateague Islands occurs from mid-May through mid-July. During this time, females deposit two to ten eggs (mean size = 30.3 ± 1.3 mm X 17.4 ± 0.9 mm) in a flask-shaped nest and may lay up to three clutches per year (Mitchell, J. C. 1994. The Reptiles of Virginia. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C., 352 pp.; Mitchell, J. C., and J. M. Anderson. 1994. Amphibians and Reptiles of Assateague and Chincoteague Islands. Virginia Museum of Natural History Special Publication 2, Martinsville, VA. 120 pp.). Incubation typically lasts 65-80 days, but hatchlings (mean CL = 26.1 ± 1.7 mm) often overwinter in the nest and emerge during warm April rains (Mitchell, op. cit.; Mitchell and Anderson, op. cit.).

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Thamnophis sirtalis sirtalis (Eastern Gartersnake). VA: Gloucester Co., 1817 Azalea Point Road, 37° 15.614 N, 76° 29.002 W. 26 January 2003. Kory L. E. Steele and Leslie Bowie.

Two *Thamnophis sirtalis sirtalis* were found hibernating in a buried plastic water meter box measuring 40 x 27.5 x 37 cm, 1 m from a paved residential road. The box protruded a maximum of 5.6 cm above the ground surface. The lid of the box had a finger hole 1.4 x 1.6 cm, serving as a possible point of entry. These snakes remained in the box until 5 April 2003.

The largest of the snakes was 51.0 cm SVL with a truncated tail 6.8 cm long, and weighed 68.5 g. The smaller snake was 43.5 cm SVL, and weighed 41.5 g. At the time of data collection (1230 h on 26 January), the air temperature outside of the water meter box was 6.1 C, and the temperature inside the box where the snakes were found was 3.9 C.