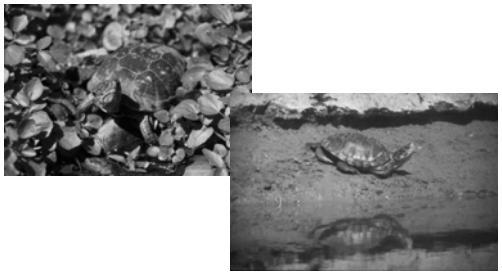
PACIFIC (WESTERN) POND TURTLE WORKSHOP



David J. Germano & Galen B. Rathbun

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

R. Bruce Bury (USGS)
California Department of Transportation
California Department of Fish and Game
California State Parks
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
U. S. Bureau of Land Management
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U. S. Geological Survey

Study Areas

IMPORTANT POINTS

- **What are you trying to determine?**
- **Size does not equal age**
- **Growth rates & reproduction vary by region**
- **Water regimes – Mediterranean climate**
- **Agriculture – cattle and ponds**
- **Manage for nest and female survival**
- **Manage populations, not individuals**
- **Management and research objectives**
- **Publish results**

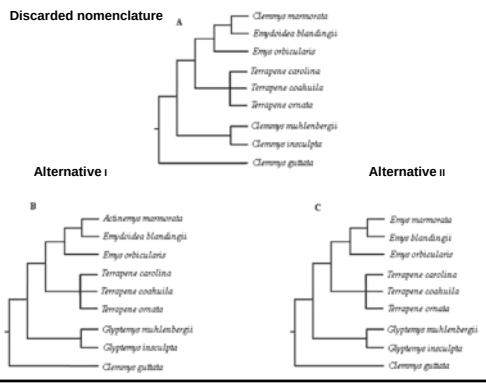
Clemmys marmorata

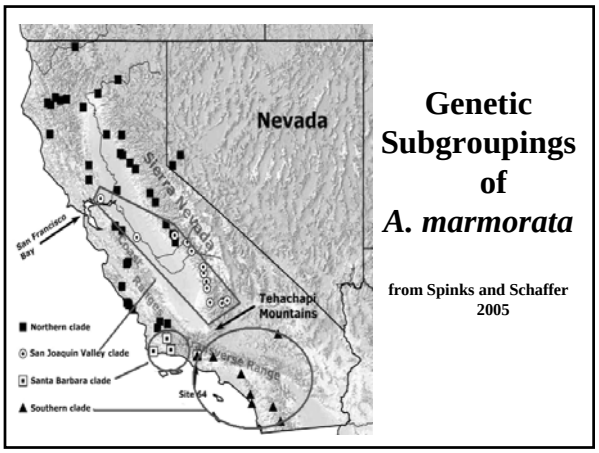
is now

Actinemys marmorata

TAXONOMY

From Bickham et al. 2007



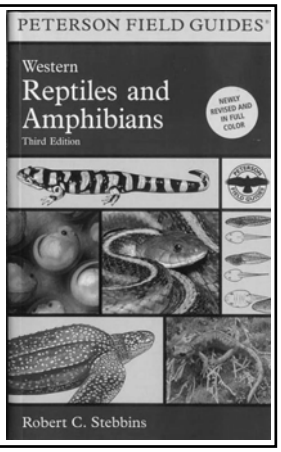


Genetic Subgroupings of *A. marmorata*

from Spinks and Schaffer 2005

Identification

Only native freshwater turtle in California, and only western painted turtle in northern Oregon / Washington



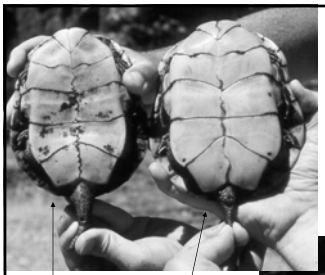
Variation

Male – Vandenberg AFB, CA

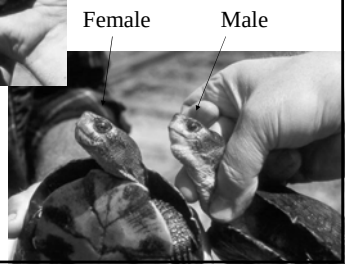
Female – Fresno, CA

Female – Yoncalla, OR

Male – Goose Lake, Kern County, CA



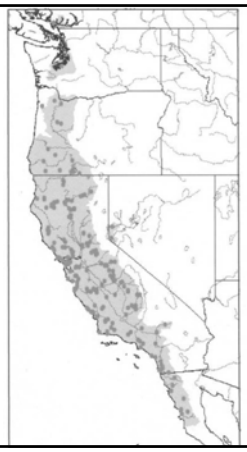
SEXUAL DIMORPHISM



DISTRIBUTION

- Sea Level to about 5500 feet
- Baja California to Washington
- Sierra Nevada / Cascade Mtn. to Coast
- In Southern California, Peninsula / Transverse Ranges to Coast
- Small Populations along Mojave River
- Truckee River Population may be Introduced

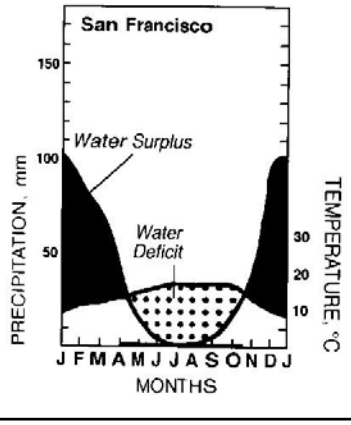
Range-wide Distribution

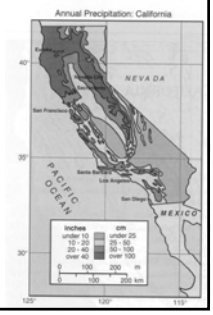


MEDITERRANEAN

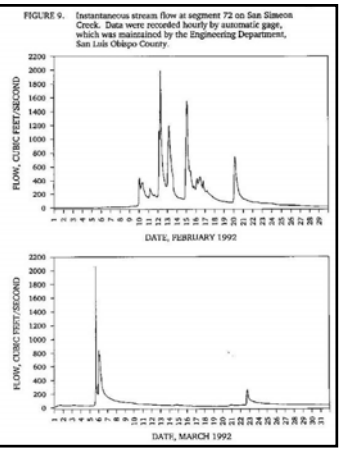
CLIMATE

Rainfall & Temperature





Stream Flow Extremes



Low & High Flows

San Simeon Creek

Annual Creeks

Natural Ponds Are Rare
Dune (Slack) Pond

Rarity of Ponds in Pre-European California

Impacts of Creek Versus Pond Living on Life History

HABITATS

Coastal Lagoons

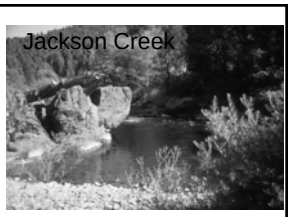
San Simeon - Fall

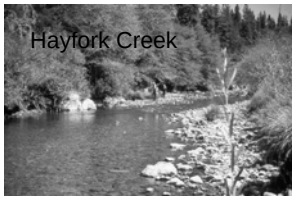
San Simeon - Winter

San Simeon - Spring

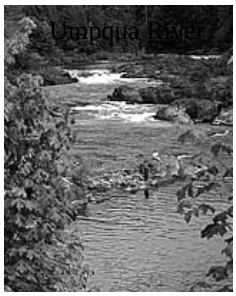
San Simeon – Summer = Annual

Perennial Creeks

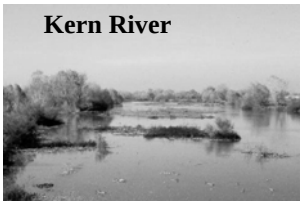




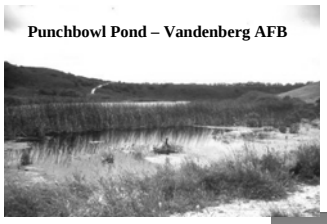
Perennial Rivers



Kern River



Central Valley "Natural" Wetlands



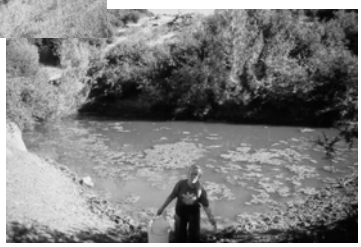
Man-made Ponds Are Common

Agricultural and Urban Development

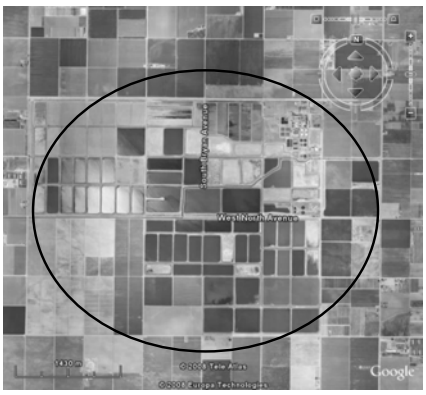
Roadside ditch – Klamath Basin

Whiskeytown Reservoir

Sierra Ponds (man-made)



Wastewater (& nutrients!) Storage



Sewage treatment ponds at Fresno with hundreds of *A. marmorata*

Percolation Pond

Cows Are Important

Cattle Bring Stock Ponds (reliable water)

Although humans have destroyed and altered much natural habitat, they have also created habitat

Net Gain or Loss?

Cattle Create Open Water (= warm water)

Cattle Fertilize Ponds (dung)

Habitats Summary

- Most areas with water – habitat generalist
- Annual & perennial aquatic habitats
- Natural rivers, creeks, streams, lakes, marshes, ponds, and mud holes
- Man-made stock ponds, sewage storage and percolation ponds, canals, and reservoirs
- Pond structure, including depth, basking sites, vegetation and upland habitats important
- Creek structure, including pools, flow, depth, temperature, vegetation, and upland habitats important
- Nutrients (=food)

ECOLOGY

- Eat aquatic arthropods, fish, carrion, and some vegetation (algae mostly).
- Nutrients – livestock & human!
- Thermoregulate (bask) on rocks, logs, algal mats, mud banks, sand to warm up.
- Wary of disturbances and dive into deep water or under banks and vegetation to escape.
- Active March – October mostly (all year in Southern California?)
- May leave water for uplands to avoid adversity

REPRODUCTION

Capture to Assess Reproduction

Palpation to Determine if Gravid

X-Radiographs to Count Eggs

Marking for Subsequent Individual Identification

Filing marginal scutes

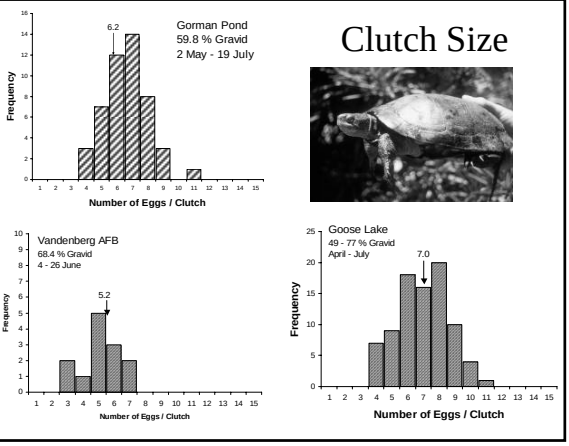
Inserting a PIT tag

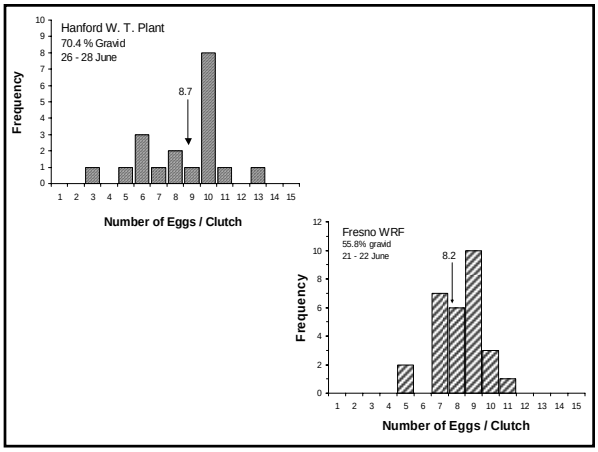
Regional Comparison of Reproduction

- Greater clutch size in north, smaller to south

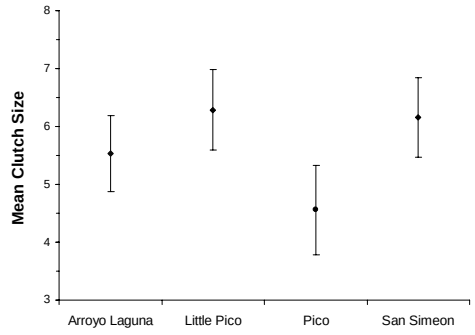
- Oregon/Washington: means of 6.5 – 10.0 eggs/clutch
- Central Valley: 7.0 – 8.5 eggs/clutch
- Coastal California: 4.9 – 5.7 eggs/clutch
- Southern California: 4.5 – 6.5 eggs/clutch

Clutch Size

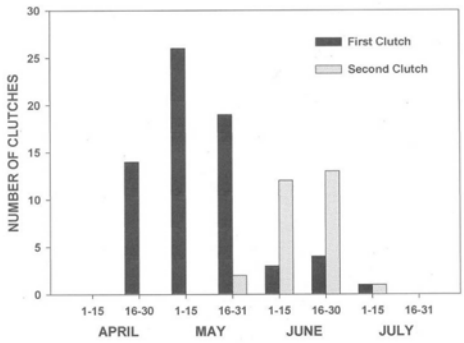




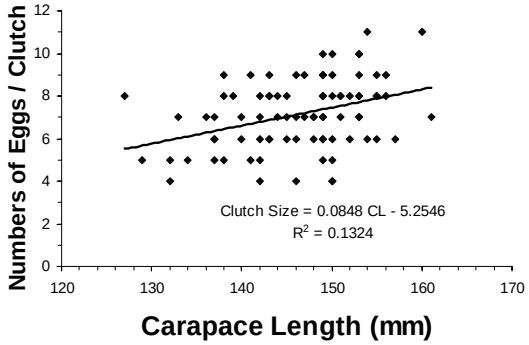
Local Variation in Clutch Size



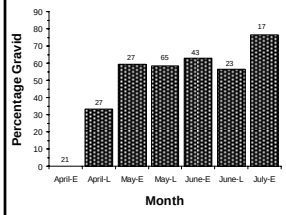
Double Clutching Per Year

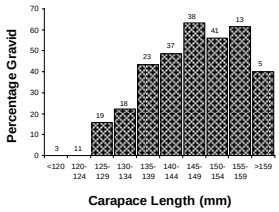


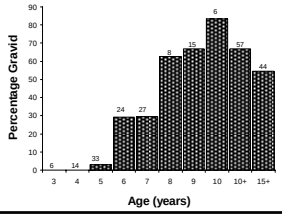
Goose Lake



Example of Month, Size, and Age of Reproduction

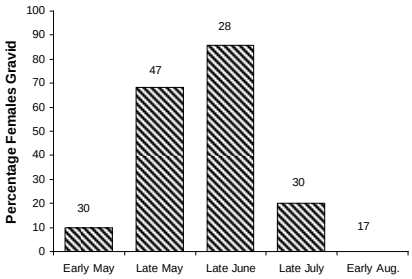






Goose Lake
(400' elevation)

High Elevation Delays Start of Reproduction



Gorman pond
(3700' elevation)

Reproduction Summary

- Sexual maturity at 5 – 6 years (Central Valley), probably older in north
- Reproductive in late April – July (August?) in most areas and some double clutch
- Nest in sunny areas within 5 – 100 m (sometimes up to 2 km) of water
- Incubation times 75 – 100 days
- Young hatch in late Fall or overwinter and hatch in early spring of following year

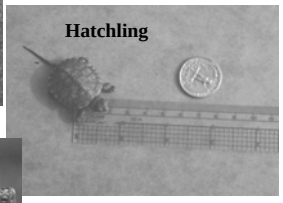
POPULATION BIOLOGY

Size Classes
(These are not age classes!)

Adult - ≥ 120 mm Carapace Length

Juvenile - < 120 mm CL

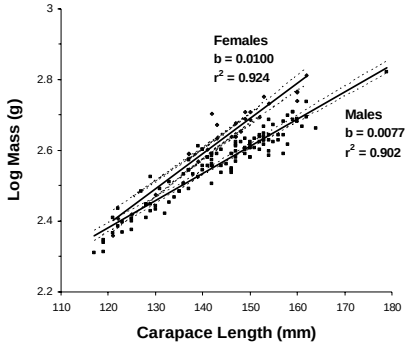
Hatchling – just hatched (25–35 mm CL)



Hatchling

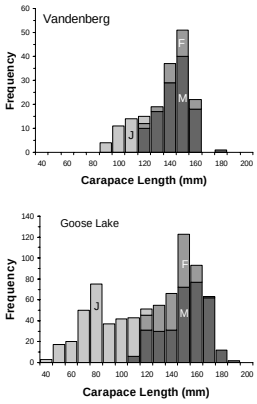
1-year old juvenile

Weight – Length: Vandenberg

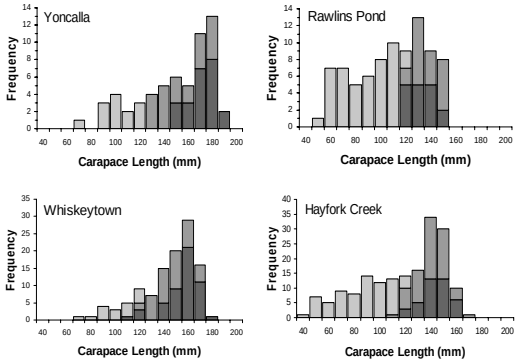


Scute Annuli Used to Estimate Age of Juveniles

Size Structure

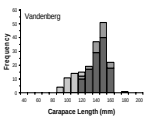


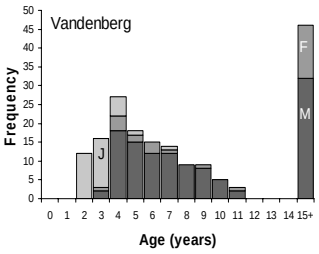
Size Structure



Age Structure

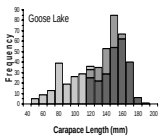
Vandenberg AFB

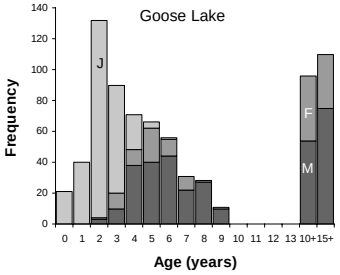




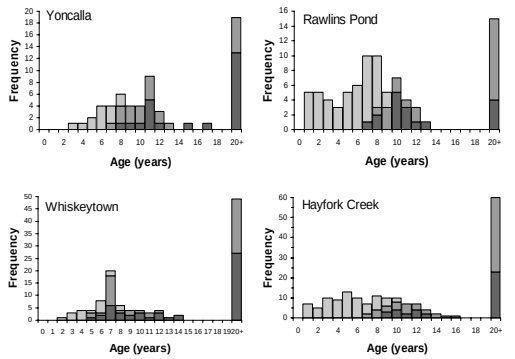
Age Structure

Goose Lake

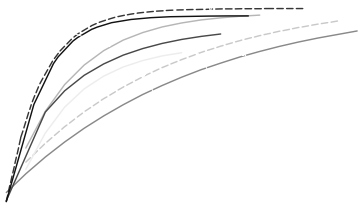




Age Structure

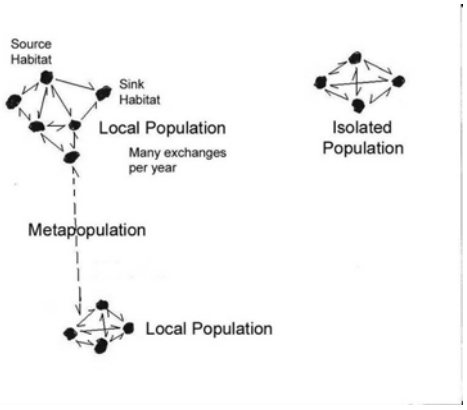


Growth Comparison



POPULATION MODEL

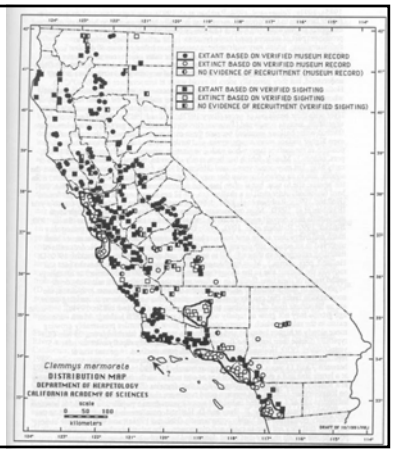
- METAPOPULATION--Two or more local populations rarely linked by migrating individuals
- ISOLATED POPULATION--A local population not exchanging individuals with any other local population
- LOCAL POPULATION--Turtles in habitats linked by the regular exchange of individuals



Extinction Sequence

- Metapopulation linkages are broken, creating isolated local populations
- Local populations lose mosaic of local habitats
- Local populations go extinct

Local Extinctions

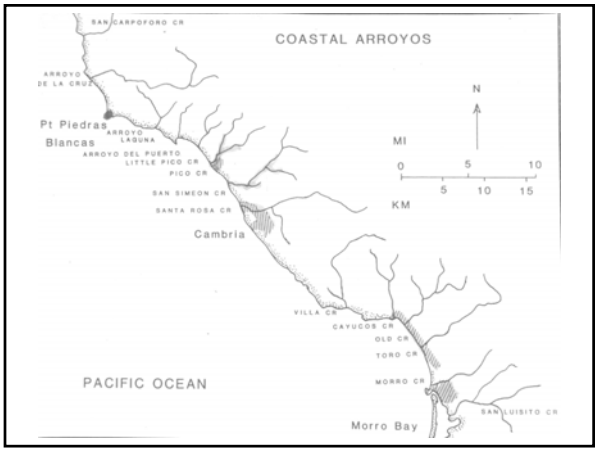


Isolated populations will not

persist without management

MOVEMENTS

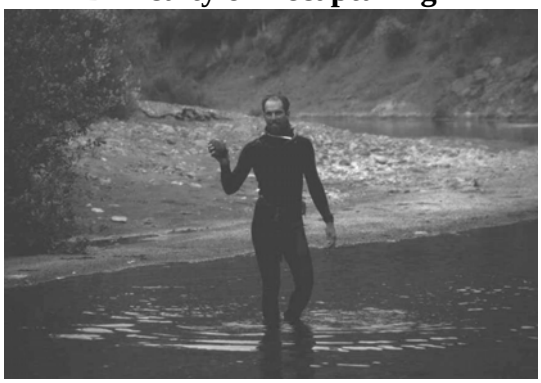
Basking, Breeding,
and Avoiding Adversity



Radio Transmitter Attachment

One of Several Possible Configurations

Difficulty of Recapturing



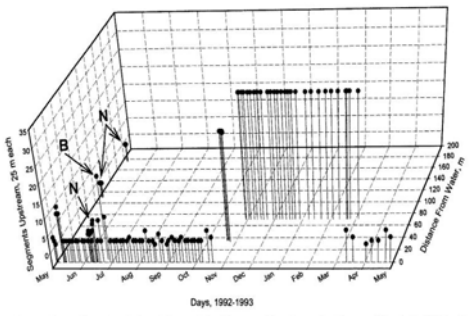
The Stealth Move…

Why Did Solar Transmitters Fail?

Radiotracking –
Creeks
Ponds
Uplands

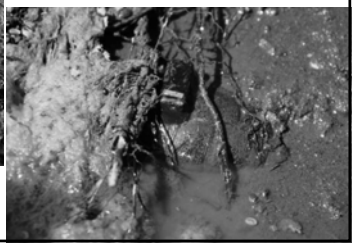
Female Use of Uplands in Time & Space

Basking, Nesting, and Avoiding Adversity



Typical Solar Basking Site

Basking in
Floating Algae
in Creek



Terrestrial Basking

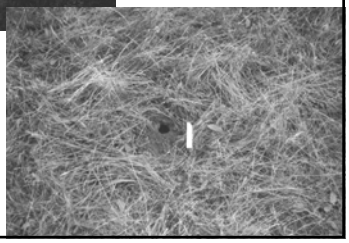
Movements to Uplands for Nesting

- **Open Sun**
- **Low Vegetation**
- **South Facing Slope**

Riparian

Glade

Arroyo Laguna



Riparian

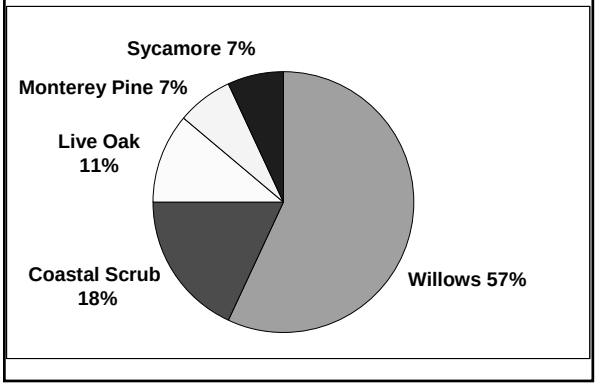
Glade

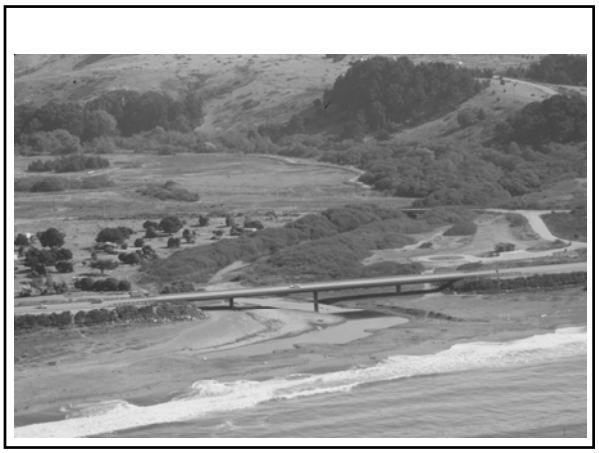
Pico Creek

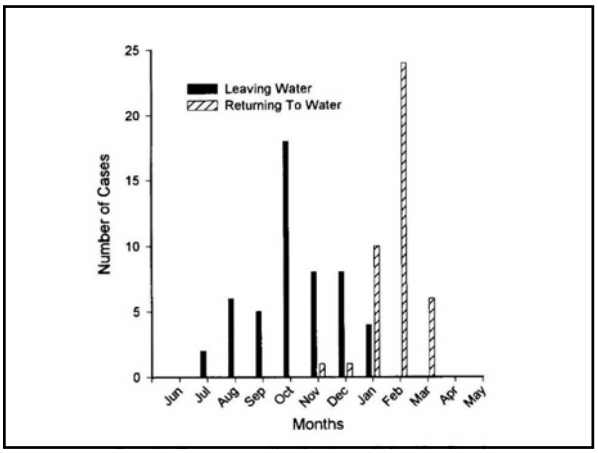
Movements to Uplands to Escape Adversity (Refuging)

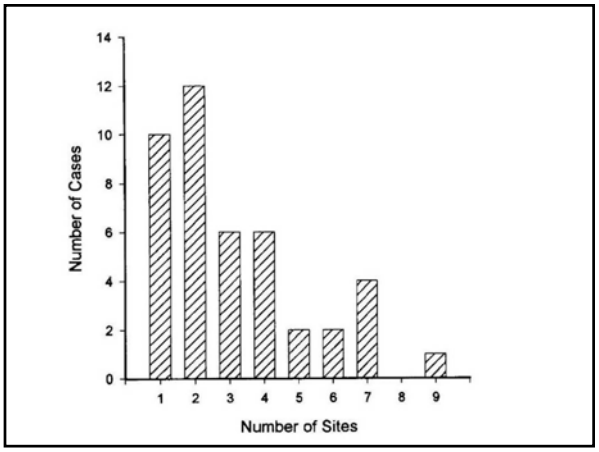
- **Avoiding too much or too little water**
- **Not near water**
- **North-facing slope**
- **Well vegetated**

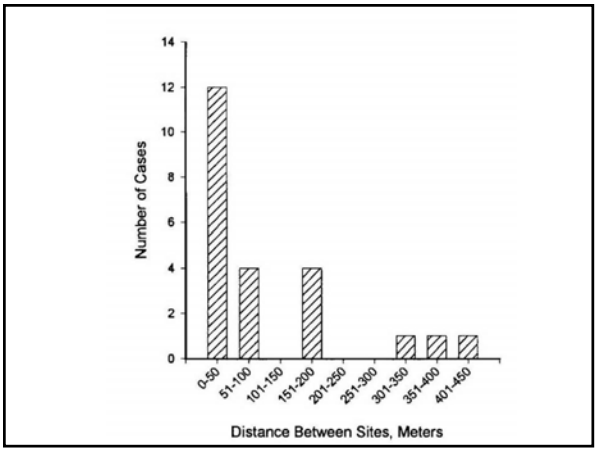
Habitat at Refuge Sites











Upland Use Summary Statistics

Upland Use	No. Individuals	No. Sites	Mean (+/- S.D.) Distance to Water, m	Range Distance to Water, m	Range or Mean (+/- S.D.) at Site, days	Maximum Elevation from Creek, m
Basking	9	28	4.5 (3.0)	0.5-12.0	1-5	4.5
Refuging	28	43	49.7 (54.8)	8.0-280.0	111.0 (44.3)	38.0
Nesting	8	12	28.3 (18.9)	9.5-80.0	1-3	17.5

Movement Corridors

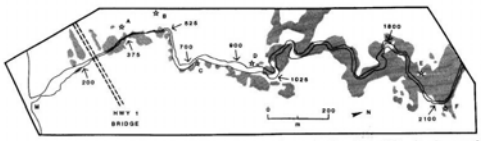
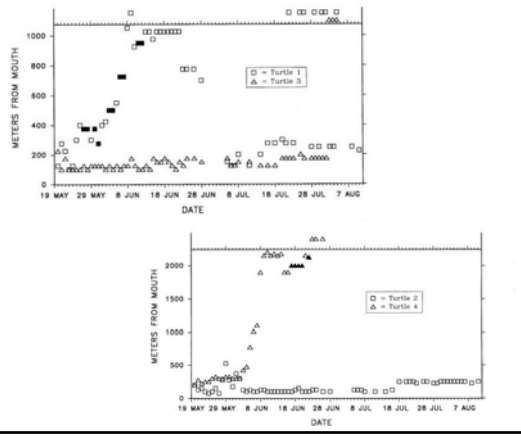


FIG. 2—Arroyo Laguna-Oak Knoll Creek, illustrating path of stream bed (parallel solid lines) and extent of closed-canopy riparian woodland (shaded). Distances from mouth of arroyo (M) are in meters (arrows). Stars show turtle overnight sites outside the stream bed: A = turtle 1, 26 May 1989; B = turtle 1, 2 June 1989; C = turtle 1, 5 June 1989; D = turtle 1, 10 June 1989; E = turtle 4, 16 and 18 June 1989; F = turtle 4, 21 June 1989.



BUT,
Most Turtles in Ponds

DO NOT

Make Long Moves
Into Uplands

THREATS

- **Urban Influences**
- **Agricultural Influences**
- **Exotic Predators**
- **Natural Predators**
- **Contaminants & Disease**

Road-killed Turtles

Urban Impacts

Bridges & Culverts

Water Regimes & Barriers

Agricultural Impacts

Cattle & Vegetation

Exotic Predators
(bullfrogs really a problem?)

Introduced Centrarchid Fishes – Bluegill & Largemouth bass

Hatchling eastern turtles not eaten in experiments:
Semlitsch and Gibbons. 1989. Copeia 1989:1030-1031.
Britson and Gutzke. 1993. Copeia 1993:435-440.

Native Predators

Nest Predation

Raccoon or Skunk?

Agricultural Chemicals

MANAGEMENT

Predator Control

Nest Site Exclosures

Mesh Size

**Water Regimes
And Vegetation**

**Managing
Ponds
for Turtles**

Constructed Pond - Failed

Cattle Exclosure for Habitat Diversity

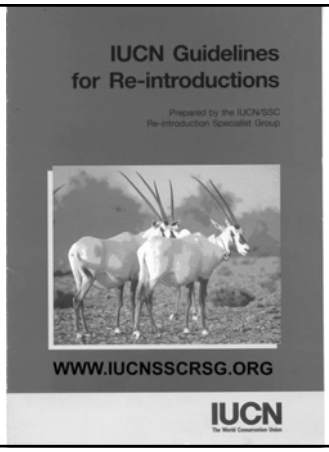
**Golf Course Ponds –
Missed Opportunities?**

Uplands

Buffer Zones

MOVING TURTLES - DEFINITIONS

- Translocation
- Re-introduction (including head-start)
- Re-enforcement (including rescue)
- Introduction



Planning Turtle Translocations

- Aims & Objectives
- Multidisciplinary Approach
- Pre-project Activities
- Socio-economic & Legal Requirements
- Planning, Preparation, & Release Stages
- Post-release Activities

Head Start Programs

- In theory, raising turtles until they are large enough to avoid predation by most numerous predator should increase numbers of turtles.
- Turtle eggs either obtained from captive adults or nest dug up, or hatchlings found in wild.
- Accelerate growth of turtles by feeding rich diet.
- Release large-sized juveniles to natural site.

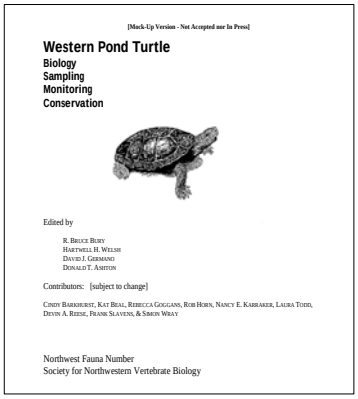
Examples of Head Start Programs

- Washington - 3 sites with releases since 1991:
  - 296 turtles released at Klickitat sites (64% recaptured in 2003)
  - 141 turtles released at Skamania site (40% recaptured in 2003)
  - 137 turtles released at Pierce NWR (43% recaptured in 2003)
- Oregon – turtles released near Corvallis in 1994.
- Oregon – Army Corps released turtles near reservoir west of Eugene 1993 - 2002.
- California – UC Davis, 33 turtles released into arboretum waterway from 1996-1998: 21 recaptured by 2001.
- California – Kern River Preserve project started in 2006.
- California – CSU Sonoma project started in 2007.

Critique of Head Starting Turtles

- Is there really a problem for hatchling survival? Bullfrogs and bass probably not an issue.
- Reducing populations of nest predators may be more beneficial.
- Are any diseases being introduced into native population?
- Habitat protection and enhancement may be more cost effective.

Site Assessment Survey Protocol


[Mock-Up Version - Not Accepted nor In Press]

Western Pond Turtle
Biology
Sampling
Monitoring
Conservation

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Northwest Fauna Number
Society for Northwestern Vertebrate Biology

Site Assessment

- **Western Pond Turtles may occur in any body of water, but:**
- **Size: smaller bodies of water contain proportionally more turtles than large bodies**
- **Depth: shallower (1-2 m) better habitat than deep (> 2 m) water**
- **Structures: logs and rocks provide good basking sites, although shoreline and vegetation mats are also used as basking sites**

Survey Protocols

- Presence/Absence: visual surveys for 15 min. recording number seen every 5 minutes.
- Trend Assessment: visual surveys for 35 min. recording maximum number seen every 5 min. Report maximum number seen in 35 min. Visit site 3 times a year.

Trapping Protocols

Calm Water in Streams

Air Pocket (trap on bottom)

Air Pocket

(float in trap)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

RESEARCH NEEDS

- **Effect of Exotic Predators**
- **Translocation & Head Start Success**
- **Success of Nest Exclosures**
- **Reproduction Across the Range**

EQUIPMENT

- **Waders**
- **Wet suit**
- **Float tubes**
- **Binoculars**
- **Traps & nets**
- **Radio receivers & transmitters**
- **Marking & tagging equipment**

EQUIPMENT SUPPLIERS

- **Cabela's**
- **Ben Meadows**
- **Forestry Suppliers**
- **Bass Pro**
- **Memphis Net & Twine**
- **Nylon Net Company**
- **Biomark**
- **Holohil Systems**
- **Wildlife Materials**
- **Communications Specialists**

IMPORTANT POINTS

- **Size does not equal age**
- **Growth rates & reproduction vary by region**
- **Water regimes – Mediterranean climate**
- **Agriculture – cattle and ponds**
- **Manage for nest and female survival**
- **Manage populations, not individuals**
- **Management and research objectives**
- **Publish results**

REGULATORY ISSUES

California Department of

Fish and Game