

CHRYSEMYS PICTA (Painted Turtle). BASKING BEHAVIOR.

Chrysemys picta is a widespread species of emydid turtle, ranging from southern Canada to the southeastern United States (Ernst 1971. Cat. Am. Amphib. Rept. 106:1–4; Ernst and Lovich 2009. Turtles of the United States and Canada. Second Edition. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland. xii + 827 pp.). Across this wide distribution, *C. picta* typically uses shallow, slow-moving, aquatic habitats with abundant submerged vegetation (Ernst and Lovich 2009, *op. cit.*), including lakes (Bury and Germano 2003. Am. Midl. Nat. 149:241–244), sloughs (Anderson et al. 2003. J. Freshw. Ecol. 17:171–177), and disturbed sites, such as wastewater settling ponds (Lindeman 1996. Copeia 1996:114–130). In South Dakota, *C. picta* is found state-wide, occurring in most aquatic habitats (Ballinger et al. 2000. Trans. Nebraska Acad. Sci. 26:29–46) and is the most abundant turtle species in the state (DRD, unpubl. data). In the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR) of eastern South Dakota, depressional wetlands dominate the landscape and exist among a matrix of row-crop agriculture (e.g., corn, soybeans; Dahl 2014. Status and Trends of Prairie Wetlands in the United States 1997 to 2009. U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Ecological Services, Washington, DC. 67 pp.). Surrounding many of these wetlands are thick stands of cattails (*Typha* spp.) and further upland, invasive Reed Canary Grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) and agriculture (Wright and Wimberley 2013. Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U. S. A. 110:4134–4139). Most trees are restricted to riparian corridors, and therefore, there is a noticeable absence of woody debris that can be used as basking substrates at most PPR wetlands. Occasionally, rocks are present in these wetlands, which arrived from glacial till deposited during the last glacial periods (Flint 1955. Geol. Surv. Prof. Pap. 262:vi + 1–173 pp). Given the limited availability of physical basking substrates in many PPR wetlands, *C. picta* has been observed basking on top of dense aquatic macrophytes or vegetation and on nests of Common Loons (*Gavia immer*; Gelatt and Kelley 1995. Can. Field-Nat. 109:456–458),

Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*), and other waterfowl (DRD, pers. obs.). Additionally, Hunt et al. (2018. Herpetol. Rev. 49:524–525) reported unusual basking substrates for *C. picta* in Minnesota, USA, finding individuals basking on the carcasses of an American Beaver (*Castor canadensis*) and a Common Carp (*Cyprinus carpio*) floating in the water. Here, we report an additional unusual basking substrate used by *C. picta* in South Dakota.

On 12 May 2019 at 1636 h, we observed a single adult female *C. picta* basking on top of a White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) carcass along a flooded road-side ditch along IH-90 in McCook County, South Dakota, USA (43.66490°N, 97.47478°W; WGS 84; Fig. 1). It was surmised that the deer was killed from a vehicle collision, especially considering the proximity to a major interstate. The road-side ditch was ca. 1 m deep and was connected to series of adjacent wetlands to the south, likely the result of recent heavy spring rains in the region. We observed no other suitable basking substrates (e.g., logs, rocks) within the immediate vicinity of this individual. This observation adds to the list of animal carcasses used as basking substrates by *C. picta* and other emydid turtles (see Munscher and Butterfield 2016. Herpetol. Rev. 47:455). The use of animal carcasses as basking substrates may be common in habitats where typical basking substrates are limited.

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FIG. 1. Adult female *Chrysemys picta* basking on a White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) carcass in McCook County, South Dakota, USA.