

# A SIGHTING OF THE WESTERN PAINTED TURTLE FROM MORGAN CREEK, KILLDEER BADLANDS, SASKATCHEWAN

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While exploring the Killdeer Badlands on 30 April 1983 the author, Jim Gibson, and Barb Fosbery observed three Western Painted Turtles (*Chrysemys picta belli*). The turtles were hauled up on a point of land adjacent to Morgan Creek sunning themselves in the late evening sun (6:40 p.m.). The sky was clear and sunny. The air temperature was about 15°C. The turtle most clearly seen appeared quite large — estimated carapace length of 20 cm. The other two seemed noticeably smaller but were not seen clearly enough to estimate size.

The three turtles were observed with 7 x 35 power binoculars for three to four minutes from distances ranging from 100 to 200 m. Upon our closer approach they took to the water. For several minutes their heads could be seen protruding above the water within 50 m of their basking place on shore. Subsequent searches along Morgan Creek in the fading evening light and the next morning failed to produce more turtle sightings.

The pond where the turtles were seen appears to have been formed by flooding due to beaver dams along Morgan Creek. It lies on the southeast side of Morgan Creek directly below the formation known locally as "The Sinking Hill". This location is approximately 20 km southwest of Killdeer and 43 km south-southwest of Fir Mountain.

Secoy says of this species: "this turtle has been reported from the Qu'Appelle

River and Souris River branches of the Assiniboine and the Frenchman River and Battle Creek tributaries of the Milk".<sup>1</sup> She reports Wood Mountain and Killdeer as locations where sightings have occurred in this region. Local rancher Boyd Anderson in conversation with the author stated that turtles are regularly seen basking along Morgan Creek in summer.

This sighting is significant for two reasons. First, it is an early date for turtles to be basking. Second, the sighting is within the boundaries of the east block of the proposed Grasslands National Park.

<sup>1</sup> SECOY, D. M. 1976. The distribution and population status of Saskatchewan's amphibians and reptiles. Saskatchewan Department of the Environment.



Killdeer Badlands area.

Gary W. Seib