

GRF Board of Directors

The Golden Rain Foundation of Laguna Woods Board of Directors meets the first Tuesday of each month at 9:30 a.m.

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A NEW GUEST IN THE VILLAGE

Something of a miracle has been discovered in Aliso Creek: a male southwestern pond turtle.

By Joan Milliman, Secretary

Our very own Aliso Creek has a male southwestern pond turtle!

Western pond turtles consist of two recently recognized species placed in either the genus *Emys* or *Actinemys* (*Emys* is more common): *Emys marmorata* (northwestern pond turtle) and *Emys pallida* (southwestern pond turtle). Until recently this turtle was recognized as a single species, but it is now recognized and managed as a species pair.

Western pond turtles occur across California in all low- to mid-elevation freshwater aquatic ecosystems. This West Coast-endemic species ranges from southern Washington to northern Baja California west of the Sierra/Cascade divide.

The only freshwater turtle in the state, western pond turtles are a unique part of California's freshwater fauna.

Although widespread, these turtles pose a key conservation concern in the state: Both species are currently listed as Species of Special Concern and both

are candidates for listing at the federal level under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

Its decline has been severe in Southern California, from Santa Barbara County to the Mexico border. Given its wide range and geographic distribution across much of the state, unique role as our only native freshwater turtle and extremely high conservation status by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the western pond turtle is an important, iconic species.

For more information about why this southwestern pond turtle in our midst is particularly important, please read “The Aliso Creek Saga” on page 36 in the Landscaping Department column.

SOUTHWESTERN POND TURTLE FACTS

Size

- Shell: 3.5 to 8.5 inches long
- Hatchlings: Approximately 1 inch long

Appearance

- Small to medium-sized drab dark brown, olive brown or blackish with a low unkeeled shell
- Usually with a pattern of lines or spots radiating from the centers of the bony plates.
- Legs have black speckling and may show cream to yellowish coloring.
- Head usually has a black network or spots may show cream to yellowish coloring.
- Males usually have a light throat with no markings, a low-domed, flatter shell and a concave bottom.
- Females usually have a throat with dark markings, a high-domed, taller shell and a flat or convex bottom that tends to be more heavily patterned than the male’s.

