

Blanding's Turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*)

Status and Protection

Within Ontario, the Blanding's Turtle is listed as a threatened species and receives protection in Ontario under the *Endangered Species Act, 2007* (ESA) and in Canada under the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). Protection prohibits actions such as killing, harming, harassing, possessing, selling or trading.

Description

The Blanding's Turtle is a medium sized freshwater turtle that is easily identified by its characteristic bright yellow throat and jaw. It has a smooth, domed shell that is usually black or dark brown, but is sometimes grey or a lighter brown. The shell has tan to yellow lines or spots scattered at random that tend to get smaller and may fade altogether as the turtle ages. The lower shell (plastron) is a rich yellow. The sides of the long neck and the top of the head are often dark brown or black in males and paler and sometimes mottled in females. The upper jaw is notched and the mouth curves upwards, which gives the impression that the turtle is smiling. The plastron is hinged so that some adult turtles can completely close their shell after pulling in their head and feet. The coloring in juveniles is generally brighter, but the spots and lines that characterize the shell of this species only develop after the second year.



* Photo courtesy of Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources

Distribution

The Blanding's Turtle's range occurs in the southern Great Lakes region from Nebraska in the west, Illinois in the south, and Ontario in the east. Additional isolated populations can be found in Quebec, Nova Scotia and near the east coast of the United States. In Ontario it can be found throughout the southern and central portions of the province except along the Bruce Peninsula and the far southeast.ⁱ



* Photo courtesy of Mary Ferguson© and the ROM

Habitat

The Blanding's Turtle inhabits a network of lakes, streams, and wetlands, preferring shallow wetland areas with abundant vegetation. In general, the species prefers shallow water that is rich in nutrients, organic soil, and dense vegetation.ⁱⁱ Adults are generally found in open or partially vegetated sites, whereas juveniles are more reclusive by nature and prefer areas that contain thick, aquatic vegetation including sphagnum, water lilies, and algae. Blanding's Turtle can also spend significant

portions of time in upland areas moving between wetlands (traveling up to 7 kilometres). The species usually nests in dry conifer or mixed hardwood forests, up to 410 metres (m) from any body of water. Females also like partially vegetated sites such as fields or roadways.

They dig their nest in a variety of loose substrates, including sand, organic soil, gravel, and cobblestone. Overwintering occurs in permanent pools that average about 1 m in depth or in slow-flowing streams.^{iii iv}

ⁱ COSEWIC. 2005. COSEWIC assessment and update status report on the Blanding's Turtle *Emydoidea blandingii* in Canada. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Ottawa. viii + 40 pp. http://www.rom.on.ca/ontario/risk.php?doc_type=fact&id=317&lang=en

ⁱⁱ COSEWIC. 2005. COSEWIC assessment and update status report on the Blanding's Turtle *Emydoidea blandingii* in Canada. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Ottawa. viii + 40 pp. http://www.rom.on.ca/ontario/risk.php?doc_type=fact&id=317&lang=en

ⁱⁱⁱ Blanding's Turtle by Mary Ferguson/© ROM. http://www.rom.on.ca/ontario/risk.php?doc_type=fact&id=317&lang=en

^{iv} Blanding's Turtle, Species at Risk Public Registry, 2010. http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/species/speciesDetails_e.cfm?sid=846