

Information on Blanding's turtles (*Emydoidea blandingii*)

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Species description

There is only a single living species in the genus *Emydoidea*. Thus, the Blanding's turtle is very unique. It is a medium sized turtle (to 26 cm) with a smooth, domed, dark blue black carapace with faint yellow spotting. The plastron is yellow with dark blotches. They have a long neck and the chin and throat are bright yellow. See pictures below.

Distribution

Blanding's turtles range from southern Ontario and southern Quebec through the Great Lakes region and west to Nebraska, Iowa, and Missouri. There are seemingly isolated populations in New York, New Hampshire, Maine, and Nova Scotia. There are many sightings of Blanding's turtles in the Ottawa area confirmed by the Natural History Information Centre of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. See maps below.

Habitat

Blanding's turtles prefer shallow waters with a soft bottom and abundant aquatic vegetation. They can be found in calm waters such as lakes, ponds, marshes, creeks, and wetlands. Although primarily aquatic, they can travel overland to go from water body to water body.

Natural history

In Ontario, Blanding's turtles emerge from their winter hibernation in late April. They mate soon after emergence from hibernation and throughout spring. Females lay their 6-17 eggs on land, but in close proximity to water, in June and early July. Females use their rear legs to excavate a nest in sandy soils exposed to sunlight. They deposit their eggs at the bottom of the nest and then cover the nest with the excavated soil and leave the eggs to incubate. There is no parental care in turtles. As in most turtles, the sex of the offspring is determined by the incubation temperature of the eggs. The eggs hatch in late summer and the offspring excavate out of the nest on their own. The offspring then reach the nearest water body to start their independent life. Blanding's turtles feed on crustaceans, fish, frogs, snails, insects, and some aquatic plants. It is believed that Blanding's turtles use their prominently yellow throat to imitate the

appearance of territorial green and bull frogs. When the frogs approach the presumed territorial intruder, they are consumed by the turtle.

Adult Blanding's turtles have few natural predators (except humans), but their eggs and juveniles are frequently consumed by racoons, skunks, foxes, and crows. This turtle can live in excess of 50 years and become sexually mature at 10-15 years of age.

Suitability of the Leitrim wetland complex for Blanding's turtles

I visited the Leitrim wetland complex in early May 2007 to assess its suitability for Blanding's turtles. Blanding's turtles do not require vast expanses of water, but they do require standing, open water. They can travel overland from wetland to wetland. Therefore, the larger beaver ponds in the Leitrim wetland complex would be suitable for Blanding's turtles. I observed several painted turtles in those beaver ponds during my visit and painted turtles have similar habitat requirements to Blanding's turtles. The fact that there are sightings of Blanding's turtles in the immediate vicinity of the Leitrim wetland complex indicates that the wetland complex could be inhabited by Blanding's turtles

References

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