



Blanding's Turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*)

Em-me-doid-e-ah blan-ding-eye



Description: Carapace length 5 ½ to 11 ½ inches. The Blanding's turtle is a medium sized, semi aquatic turtle with a highly domed carapace ranging in color from blackish to bluish black with smooth scutes and tan to pale brown radial flecks, dashes, and dots on each scute. The plastron is partially hinged, and is typically yellowish with large, dark rectangular blotches along the margins unless stained or darkened by minerals. The skin on the head and limbs is also blackish to grayish, with the chin, neck, and through a distinct bright yellow. The upper jaw is also notched, giving this species its characteristic "smiling"

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appearance.

Taxonomy and Classification:

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Testudines

Suborder: Cryptodira

Family: Emydidae

Genus: Emydoidea

Species: *Emydoidea blandingii**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Similar/Confusing Species: The North American wood turtle (*Glyptemys insculpta*) has noticeably sculpted scutes on the carapace. Ornate box turtles (*Terrapene ornata*) have yellowish to light cream colored radiating lines on each scute of the carapace, and a fully hinged plastron.

Etymology: Emydoidea- Emydo (freshwater tortoise) eidos (form or resemblance). blandingii-(in honor of Dr. William Blanding (1772-1857)).

Subspecies: None.

Range & Habitat: Ranges throughout most of Wisconsin in suitable and appropriate habitat, except extreme north central portions. Blanding's turtles may be found in relatively quiet, shallow, weedy or grassy temporary, semi-permanent to permanent wetland habitats. These wetland habitats may include ponds, lakeshores, streams, rivers, marshes, sloughs, and river backwaters.

Habits & Natural History: The Blanding's turtle is a medium sized, semi aquatic species that begins its emergence in March or April to reproduce before dispersing to nearby wetlands. These turtles are shy and inoffensive to humans, usually retreating into the water or withdrawing their head and limbs into their shell when approached or handled. They will feed on aquatic insects, crustaceans, small fish, and frogs, and are capable of swallowing food both under and above water. If approached and observed quietly, however, these turtles may be observed basking on logs, rocks, and shore banks, and can readily be identified even from a distance by their bright yellow throat and chin. Formerly listed as a state threatened species, the Blanding's turtle has recently been downgraded to "special concern" status due primarily to political reasons, although continued monitoring and conservation of these unique turtles by state officials and citizens remains needed. Blanding's turtles are a species that have faced multiple threats to their survival in Wisconsin including habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation as well as unlawful collection, increased nest predation, and exploitation.

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Phenology: Blanding's turtles will begin emerging from overwintering and mating as early as early April through May, and remain active throughout the year through September or October (or sometimes even later in the year if warmer temperatures persist or otherwise permit). Many Wisconsin turtles begin moving over land and are often encountered during May through early July as they search for sandy nesting sites.

Conservation Status: WI Special Concern and "Protected Wild Animal", with efforts to restore State Threatened status. Regulated by WI DNR. IUCN Red List Endangered (EN).

Contact

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this species, group of species, or this informational sheet, please email and contact the Madison Area Herpetological Society at info@madisonherps.org

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