



North American Wood Turtle (*Glyptemys insculpta*)

Glypt-tem-ees in-sculpt-tah

Needs Photos Of

Description: 5 ½ to 9 ½ inches shell length. The wood turtle is a medium sized turtle with a distinctly pyramided carapace characterized by heavily sculptured scutes, ranging in color from gray, yellowish gray, olive gray, to brownish gray. Carapaces may be smoother in older individuals, however. The skin is black to dark gray, with much of the head, neck, and fore limbs consisting of a reddish to reddish orange wash or scalation. The plastron is a pale yellow with large, dark rectangular blotches along the margins. The heavily sculptured carapace scutes distinguish the wood turtle from the Blanding's turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*).

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: *Glyptemys*

Species: *Glyptemys insculpta**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Similar/Confusing Species: The Blanding's turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*) lacks distinctively sculptured scutes on the carapace and has a distinctly yellow throat and chin.

Etymology: *Glyptemys*-glypt (carved) emys (turtle or tortoise). *insculpta* (carved or engraved).

Subspecies: None.

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Range & Habitat: Generally occurs throughout the northern, central, west central, and western portions of the state in suitable habitat. Occurrences elsewhere in the state are probably escaped or released captive animals. In Wisconsin, wood turtles prefer streams and rivers with moderate flow, muddy banks, and sandy or gravelly substrates, with surrounding riparian habitats including floodplain and upland forests, adjacent wetlands, meadows, and fields.

Habits & Natural History: The North American wood turtle is a medium sized, semi aquatic turtle with distinctly sculptured scutes on the carapace, which appear as though their shells were carved or sculpted from wood. Wood turtles overwinter in and immediately near stream and river banks, and emerge in as early as March or April. Following emergence, wood turtles often disperse away from these habitats into surrounding areas to forage for food and in search of sandy or gravelly nesting sites in late May through June. Wood turtles are omnivorous, feeding on earthworms, slugs, insects and other arthropods, various mosses, fruits, grasses, and fungi. Recent scientific studies have found these turtles to be quite perceptive and intelligent as well, where they have been observed stomping the ground with their feet to mimic rainfall as a means to locate food items (such as earthworms). Wood turtles are currently given statewide threatened status due to habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation as well as unlawful collection, increased nest predation, and exploitation.

Phenology: Wood 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 State Threatened; 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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