



Turtles of Pennsylvania



MIDLAND PAINTED TURTLE



SPOTTED TURTLE

Other Pennsylvania turtle species:

Common Snapping Turtle
Eastern Mud Turtle

Stinkpot Turtle
Map Turtle

Blanding's Turtle (*Candidate Species*)
Midland Smooth Softshell Turtle



EASTERN SPINY SOFTSHELL TURTLE



REDBELLIED TURTLE

Threatened Species



WOOD TURTLE



EASTERN BOX TURTLE



BOG TURTLE

Endangered Species



Common Snapping Turtle

Chelydra serpentina serpentina

Identification. The snapping turtle is easily recognized by its large head, a plastron smaller in relation to the rest of the body compared to other turtles, and a tail proportionately longer than on other turtles. The tail is at least as long as the carapace and supports a series of large saw-toothed keels on its upper side. The neck is covered with loose, warty skin. The strong jaws end in a distinct hook. The carapace of the common snapping turtle is tan to dark-brown, sometimes nearly black. The carapace is quite rough, serrated along its rear margin, and has three rows of keels running its length. These keels may be difficult to discern in older specimens. The unpatterned plastron is yellow to tan and it is cross-shaped and relatively small. It does not cover nearly as much of the underside as plastrons do on most other turtles.

Range. This large turtle resides in a broad area of the country. Its natural range extends from southern Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, and from the East Coast to the Rocky Mountains. Thus, the common snapping turtle is distributed throughout Pennsylvania.

Eastern Mud Turtle

Kinosternon subrubrum subrubrum

Identification. The eastern mud turtle has few, if any, distinctive field marks. The carapace may range from an olive to a dark-brown or almost black. There is no definitive pattern or markings. The upper shell is smooth and the scales, or scutes, have no keels. The plastron is yellow to brown and may be marked at times with black or brown. The lower shell is double-hinged and contains 11 scutes. The head of the eastern mud turtle is brown and marked with many widespread yellow spots or streaks. On the male, the tail ends in a well-developed, blunt spine.

Range. In Pennsylvania, the eastern mud turtle inhabited the extreme southeastern corner of the state, particularly in the lower Delaware River Valley. In this heavily populated area much of its habitat has been destroyed,

accounting for its dwindling numbers. Its natural range extends south from Pennsylvania to the Gulf Coast, and north to Connecticut.

Stinkpot Turtle

Sternotherus odoratus

Identification. The stinkpot's carapace is smooth, highly domed and elongated. It is normally olive-brown to dark-gray and may be marked with irregular streaks or spots of a darker color. The small plastron has 11 scutes with small patches of skin visible between them. There is a single hinge that is difficult to locate on most specimens. The female's tail is very short. The male's tail tends to be a bit longer and ends in a blunt, horny nail. Small, fleshy barbels protrude from the chin and throat. On most individuals, two light stripes stand out on an otherwise black head.

Range. Although thought at one time to be distributed statewide, studies show that the stinkpot does not inhabit the Allegheny Mountains. These same studies indicate that the stinkpot dwells in two separate ranges in opposite corners of the state. In the northwest, it is found in the swampy areas of the Shenango River Watershed and Lake Erie. It also is found in a larger area of southeastern Pennsylvania and particularly in the more centrally located counties where prosperous populations of stinkpots have been discovered in the limestone streams. The stinkpot is distributed from New England, southern Ontario and Wisconsin, south to Texas and Florida.

Midland Painted Turtle

Chrysemys picta marginata

Identification. The carapace is olive or black, oval, smooth, and somewhat flattened. Red and black markings on the edges of the shell, in the form of bars or crescent-shaped patterns, are identifying characteristics. The plastron is an unmistakable yellow or red with a dark blotch in its center. Each side of the head is marked with bright-yellow spots and stripes. Yellow and red stripes define the neck, legs and tail. The upper jaw is notched.

Range. Its range extends from southern Quebec and Ontario in Canada southward to Tennessee. It misses most of Virginia and North Carolina. In Pennsylvania, the painted turtle is found from border to border in all directions.

Spotted Turtle

Clemmys guttata

Identification. The carapace of this small turtle is black and without keels on the scales. Its upper shell is sprinkled with round yellow spots that vary greatly in number from

one specimen to another. The head, neck and legs are marked with yellow or orange spots. Its black head has an orange spot over the eyes. The lower shell, or plastron, is creamy yellow and bordered with large black blotches. The female has orange eyes and a yellow chin. The male has brown eyes and a tan chin. The male also has a long, thick tail.

Range. The spotted turtle resides in states along the Atlantic Coast from Georgia northward to southern Maine. Beginning at Maryland, its range swings to the west extending into eastern Illinois. In Pennsylvania, the spotted turtle is found east and west of the Allegheny Mountains, its range encompassing perhaps two-thirds of the state.

Wood Turtle

Clemmys insculpta

Identification. The upper shell of the wood turtle is brown and keeled. Its scutes, or large scales, are pyramidal, a series of concentric growth ridges and grooves, larger on the bottom, becoming smaller as they approach the top. These exaggerated scales appear sculptured and are rough to the touch. The plastron, or lower shell, is yellow, and each of the scutes is margined on the outer edge with black blotches. The plastron is hingeless and can aid in distinguishing this turtle from the box and Blanding's turtles, which are considered "land" turtles like the wood turtle. The lower shell of the male is concave. The female's lower shell is flat or slightly convex. The skin on the neck and front legs is frequently reddish orange. The tail is moderately heavy and nearly as long as the carapace, or upper shell.

Range. The wood turtle's range extends from Nova Scotia south to Virginia. The wood turtle is found in most of the state's 67 counties but is missing from the western border.

Bog Turtle

Clemmys muhlenbergii

Endangered Species

Identification. The bog turtle's carapace, or upper shell, is light-brown to mahogany. Its large scutes sometimes have a tinge of yellowish or reddish marks in their centers. The plastron, which is hingeless, is brownish black with some yellow along the mid-line. The head is black and marked with a yellow, orange or red blotch on each side, an important identification characteristic. The male has a medium-thick tail.

Range. The bog turtle has been found in separated ranges across parts of New York and extending southward to the western border of North Carolina. Its range includes New Jer-

sey. The bog turtle's distribution in Pennsylvania splits into two separate historic ranges, two areas where this turtle was once found in stable populations. The largest range includes southeastern Pennsylvania as far west as Franklin County and north to near the Pocono Mountains. The smaller of the two original ranges includes portions of three counties in the northwestern part of the state near the Ohio border. However, it's doubtful that the species still occurs in this range.

Blanding's Turtle

Emydoidea blandingii

Candidate Species

Identification. The Blanding's turtle has a carapace that is smooth and shaped like a helmet. It is sprinkled with a heavy profusion of pale-yellowish spots, which in some areas become connected to form vermiculations. The plastron, or lower shell, is yellow and accented with large black blotches. The chin and throat are both bright-yellow. In Pennsylvania, only the softshell turtle has a longer neck. Large protruding eyes serve only to emphasize a flat head. The plastron is hinged so that it can be closed toward the carapace, but not to the extent the box turtle is able to close up.

Range. The Blanding's turtle extends from Nebraska eastward to Ohio and Ontario. Its range is spotty east of Ohio. Although perhaps not found at all today, the Blanding's turtle in Pennsylvania never occupied a large area. Its original range included the vicinity of Lake Erie and a portion of southwestern Crawford County. Conneaut Lake and the swampy areas that now encompass Pymatuning Lake were included in the original habitat of the Blanding's.

Map Turtle

Graptemys geographica

Identification. The carapace of the map turtle is greenish to olive-brown. Its irregular pattern of thin, yellow-orange lines networking randomly across the upper shell like roads on a map gives this turtle its name. The carapace is somewhat flattened and marked with a distinct keel. The plastron is yellowish and bears no markings of any significance. Its head, neck and tail are accented with narrow yellow lines. A yellow, somewhat triangular spot appears behind each eye.

Range. The distribution of the map turtle in Pennsylvania is scattered into one larger and two smaller portions of the state. It is found along Lake Erie and in a small portion of the Ohio River Drainage. Its largest range encompasses a major portion of the Susquehanna River Basin and the lower Delaware River Ba-

sin. An interesting, recently developed theory suggests that the map turtle reached the lower Delaware by way of a series of canals. According to some experts, the map turtle was able to leave its native Lake Erie home and travel through canals to the Hudson River, which in turn gave it access to the Delaware River through a similar system of canals. Still, the distribution of the map turtle in Pennsylvania is scattered and broken into several sections. Elsewhere this turtle is found across upper New York to Wisconsin and then south into Louisiana.

Redbellied Turtle

Pseudemys rubriventris

Threatened Species

Identification. The carapace varies from brown to black and it usually has a mottled pattern of reddish brown. Several vertical red bars run from the center of the shell to its outer edge. The lower shell, or plastron, while sometimes coral-colored, more often is yellow to reddish. There is a prominent notch at the tip of the upper jaw, and an arrow-shaped stripe runs atop the head between the eyes to the snout.

Range. Although recent sightings have been sparse at best, the redbellied turtle was known, at one time at least, to have inhabited the lower Delaware River, the lower Susquehanna River and a portion of the Potomac River Basin, which reaches into a small section of southcentral Pennsylvania. Today it is found primarily in the lower Delaware River Drainage and at one known location in the Potomac River Basin. Its range extends from southern New Jersey and eastern West Virginia to northeast North Carolina.

Eastern Box Turtle

Terrapene carolina carolina

Identification. The carapace of the eastern box turtle is high-domed and keeled. Color and patterns vary greatly, but black or brown are probably most often seen, with markings of yellow, orange or olive. The sharply rising dome-shaped upper shell is an identifying characteristic. The colors on the plastron are quite varied. Markings may range from yellow-orange to olive, on a tan, brown or black background. The plastron has a single broad, movable hinge that allows the box turtle to close it tightly against the upper shell. In this way it becomes effective protection from predators and other disturbances. The male usually has red eyes. The eyes of the female are normally yellowish brown. The upper jaw ends in a down-turned beak.

Range. The eastern box turtle inhabits an area encompassing a large segment of the

eastern states. It extends from the lower New England states to Georgia and west to Tennessee and Illinois. It inhabits a large portion of Pennsylvania. It is absent from the Allegheny Mountains, but otherwise resides over most of the southern two-thirds of the Commonwealth. Its range in the west also reaches northward into the Lake Erie Basin.

Eastern Spiny Softshell Turtle

Trionyx spiniferus spiniferus

Identification. The carapace, or upper shell, of the eastern spiny softshell turtle gives this reptile its name. The shell easily bends at its sides and across its rear margin. The carapace is olive to tan or yellowish brown. Spots, which are slightly darker than the background color, are bordered with black. They are more predominant toward the center of the shell. On the female, these spots are larger and appear more as dark blotches. The large carapace is also marked with a dark line around its rim. The shell is covered with a soft, leathery skin. It does not have scales, or scutes. The plastron is white and for the most part unmarked. The feet are deeply marked with streaks and spots. On adult males, the carapace is covered with very small projections that feel like sandpaper to the touch. They help distinguish the spiny softshell turtle from the smooth softshell turtle. Overall the body of the softshell turtle is flat, almost pancake-like, and oval-shaped. The snout is tubular and ends in a blunt point.

Range. The eastern spiny softshell turtle extends from western New York and West Virginia to Wisconsin and south to Tennessee. Distribution of the eastern spiny softshell turtle in Pennsylvania is limited to the western third of the state. It is found generally in the Lake Erie and Ohio River watersheds.



For more information, contact:
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