

insects. Females lay 8 to 10 eggs in nests dug in gravel banks in early summer. Wood Turtles are often removed from their habitat by people wanting pets, then released in unsuitable habitats. They are most common in northeastern mainland N.S. and southwestern Cape Breton Island, but turn up in particular river systems in other parts of the province.

Blanding's Turtle Emydoidea blandingi

This species has a high domed carapace spotted or streaked with greyish-yellow. Its plastron is yellow with black blotches, and there is yellow in the head and neck. We have one isolated small population of Blanding's Turtles in Kejimikujik Park (southwestern N.S.). The nearest other Blanding's Turtles are in Quebec.

The favourite habitat is plant-filled coves and bogs of lakes, where they are seen basking on moss and grass hummocks. They eat carrion as well as insects and snails. Like Snapping Turtles, they have a very long neck which can be withdrawn into the shell inside a "turtleneck" shaped fold of skin. Blanding's Turtles are sometimes called box turtles, but this is not quite accurate. The plastron is hinged, allowing it to close up completely at the rear; "semi-boxed" is better.

Blanding's Turtles should not be removed from their natural habitat.

Eastern Painted Turtle Chrysemys picta picta

This is the most common and most colourful turtle in Nova Scotia. The carapace is basically green with a yellow stripe down the middle and yellow edges around the shell plates. The edge is marked with red. The plastron is yellow. The head is streaked with yellow, and the neck and legs and tail are streaked with red. Painted Turtles are common in southwestern N. S., becoming less common in the northeast. Look for them in plant-filled ponds, lakes and streams. They are often seen in groups basking on logs and rocks. They seem to be most common where lily pads and pickerel weed grow, eating insects, snails and bits of lily pad.

Painted Turtles dig nests along roadsides or in cultivated fields, as well as in sand or gravel beaches. The hatchlings may dig their way out in the fall of the same year, or, if the nest surface temperature becomes lower than the nest bottom temperature, overwintering is possible. Adults hibernate at the bottom of ponds.

Turtles as Pets

Painted Turtles and Wood Turtles make good short-term pets. Put Painted Turtles in an aquarium with enough water to cover, but also rocks and a lamp so the turtle can climb out of the water to bask. An aquarium at least four times the turtle's length is minimum. Feed them as close to natural food as you can - earthworms and lettuce, for example. Try a variety of foods. Keep tank and water clean and remove uneaten food promptly to help prevent eye and shell diseases.

Wood Turtles can be kept in terrariums with aquarium gravel as the base, plus a tray of water for them to soak in. Try fresh meat or fish and apple in addition to the Painted Turtle diet. Wood Turtles are intelligent creatures - give them lots of exercise.

By the way, male turtles have a concave or "dished in" plastron, while female turtles' plastrons are flat.

After a month or two of captivity, it is best to return your turtle to a suitable habitat, well before hibernation time in autumn. This will help us all enjoy our wildlife, now and forever.

info

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Turtles

Turtles are reptiles.

You probably know a turtle by its protective shell; the top part is called the carapace and the bottom part the plastron. Other turtle features are dry scaly skin, a sharp-edged beak instead of teeth, good eyesight and hearing, and leathery-shelled eggs which they bury in sand.

Over 200 kinds of turtles are known in the world, with 7 reported from Nova Scotia. Three of these are giant marine turtles - the Atlantic Loggerhead, Atlantic Ridley and Atlantic Leatherback - that visit our oceans in summer. These turtles are sometimes seen from boats or tangled in fishing gear. They nest in more tropical parts of the world. All marine turtles are considered to be endangered species.

On the land we have four turtle species. Some people call turtles that live in fresh water terrapins, and those that live entirely on land tortoises. You can call them all turtles. Adult turtles have few enemies, but crows, bears and raccoons dig up their eggs or eat the hatchlings.

Snapping Turtle Chelydra serpentina serpentina

The snapper is our biggest turtle, up to 35 cm shell length. Recognize it by its size, its muscular limbs and long tail or by the toothed back edge of its carapace. Colour usually looks greenish-gray or dark green because of algae growing on the carapace. Underneath, the plastron is much smaller than the carapace, so this turtle cannot protect itself by drawing into its shell. It looks like a size 10 turtle in a size 6 shell! This, plus its slowness on dry land, explains the snapper's aggressive behaviour when threatened - it cannot run or hide, so its only defence is attack. If molested, it will lunge forward with a neck that can reach halfway back to its tail, and cause a painful bite. In water, snappers are shy of humans and will swim away quietly. They only come out on land in late June and early July to dig a nest and lay eggs. Leave them alone.

Snappers frequent shallow lakes and streams with lots of plants. They eat fish, amphibians, and some bigger and smaller creatures located with their especially keen sense of smell. They hibernate underwater in winter. In Nova Scotia, snappers are most common in the southwest; there are only 3 reports from Cape Breton, believed to be released captive turtles.

Wood Turtle Clemmys insculpta

Turtle lovers will tell you that this is the smartest, most alert turtle in the province. Its carapace has a sculptured, woody look and its neck and legs are orange underneath. Wood Turtles may be seen in slow-moving streams, woodlands, fields or along roadsides near streams. Some people call them mud turtles, because they bask in the sun on muddy river banks. They eat plants, berries, worms and

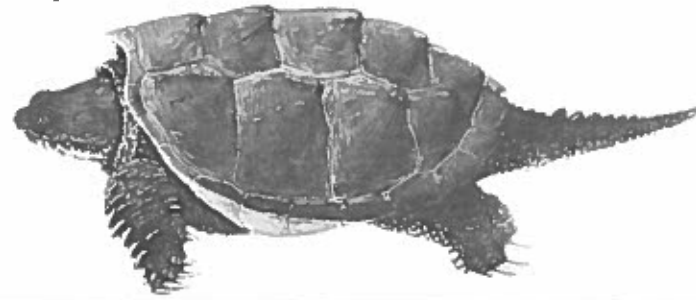
Turtles

Snapping Turtles

Chelydridae

Common Snapping Turtle

Chelydra s. serpentina

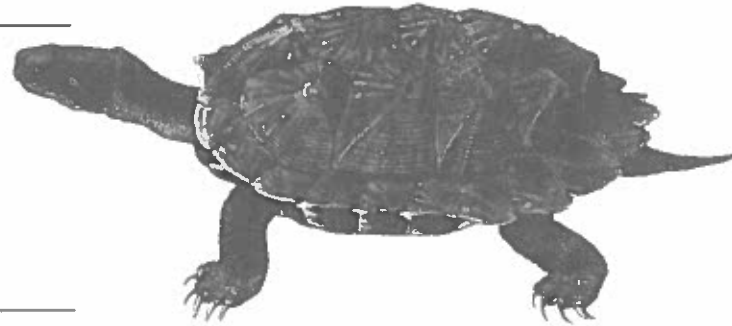


Semiaquatic, Pond & Marsh Turtles

Emydidae

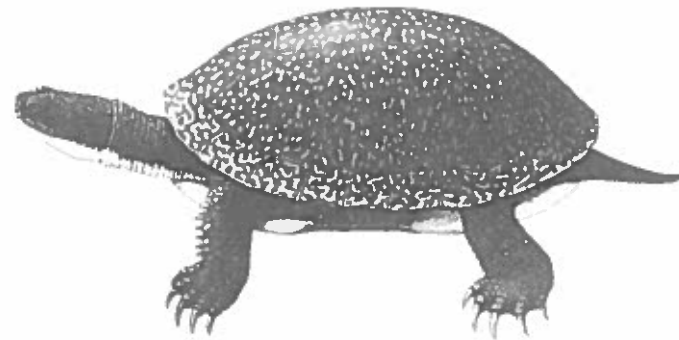
Wood Turtle

Clemmys insculpta



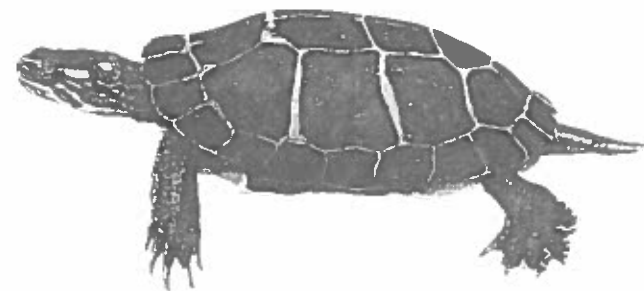
Blanding's Turtle

Emydoidea blandingi



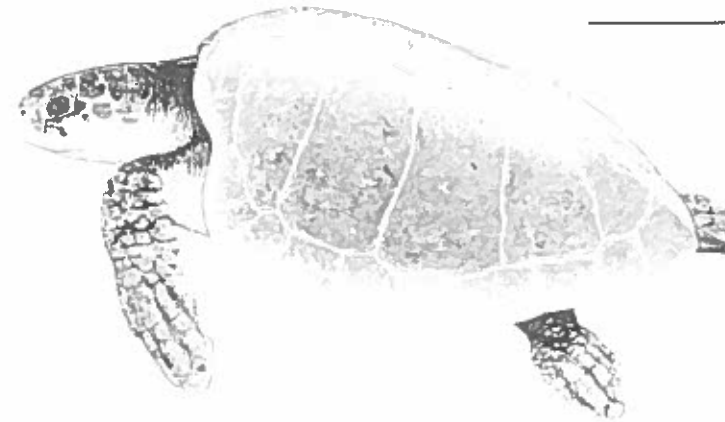
Eastern Painted Turtle

Chrysemys p. picta



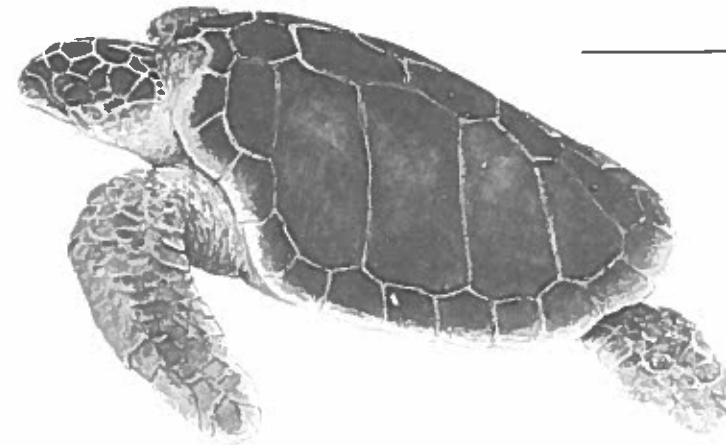
Atlantic Ridley

Lepidochelys kemp



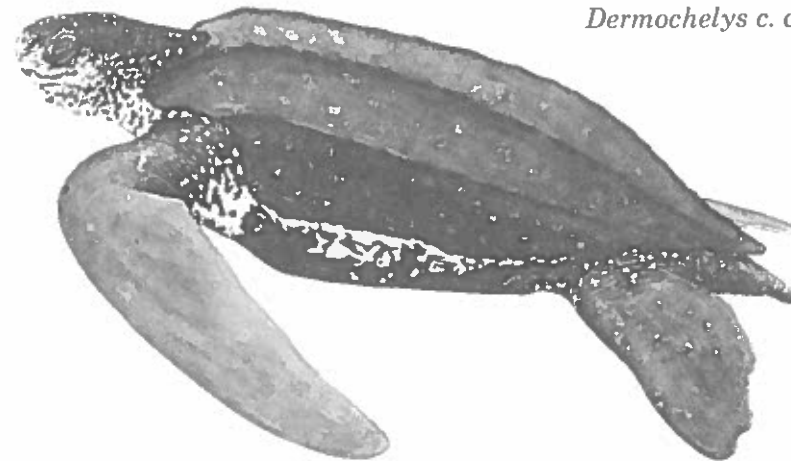
Atlantic Loggerhead

Caretta c. caretta



Atlantic Leatherback

Dermochelys c. coriacea



Marine Turtles

Cheloniidae

Leatherback Turtles

Dermochelyidae